The Masterpieces

of

Charles-Paul de Kock

FRÉDÉRIQUE AND ROCHEBRUNE AT THE BOCAL PARTY

"Do you polk?" Madame Frédérique asked me.

"Yes, madame."

"Very well; then let us take a turn. I prefer to make my entry dancing; it will be more amusing."

THE MASTERPIECES OF

CHARLES-PAUL DE KOCK

Frédérique

TRANSLATED BY

GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

WITH FOUR PHOTOGRAVURES

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FRÉDÉRIQUE

I

A GENTLEMEN'S DINNER AT DEFFIEUX'S

"A lady said to me one day:

"'Monsieur Rochebrune, would it be possible for you to love two women at once?'

"'I give you my word, madame,' I answered, frankly, 'that I could love half a dozen, and perhaps more; for it has often happened that I have loved more than two at the same time.'

"My reply called forth, on the part of the lady in question, a gesture in which there was something very like indignation, and she said, in a decidedly sarcastic tone:

"'For my part, monsieur, I assure you that I would not be content with a sixth of the heart of a man whom I had distinguished by my favor; and if I were foolish enough to feel the slightest inclination for him, I should very soon be cured of it when I saw that his love was such a commonplace sentiment.'

"Well, messieurs, you would never believe how much injury my frankness did me, not only with that lady—I had no designs upon her, although she was young and pretty; but in society, in the houses which she frequents, and at which I myself visit, she repeated what I had said

to her; and many ladies, to whom I would gladly have paid court, received me so coldly at the first compliment that I saw very plainly that they had an unfavorable opinion of me—all because, instead of being a hypocrite and dissembler, I said plainly what I thought. I tell you, messieurs, it's a great mistake to say what you think, in society. I have repented more than once of having given vent to those outpourings of the heart which we should confide only to those who know us well enough to judge us fairly; but, as society is always disposed to believe in evil rather than in good, if we have a failing, it is magnified into a vice; if we confess to a foible, we are supposed to have dangerous passions. Therefore, it is much better to lie; and yet, it seems to me, that, if I were a woman, I should prefer a lover who frankly confessed his infidelities, to one who tried to deceive me."

"If I were a woman, I should prefer a man who loved nobody but me, and would be faithful to me."

"Oh! parbleu! what an idea! It isn't certain, by any means, that all women would prefer such a man. There are faithful lovers who are so tiresome!"

"And inconstant ones who are so attractive!"

"I go even further, myself, and maintain that the very fact that a man is faithful more than a little while makes him a terrible bore. He drives his mistress mad with his sighs, his protestations of love; he caresses her too much; he thinks of nothing but kissing her. There's nothing that women get so tired of as of being kissed."

"Oho! do you think so, my little Balloquet? That simply proves that you're a bad kisser, or that you're not popular. On the contrary, women adore caressing men; I know what I'm talking about."

"Oh! what a conceited creature this Fouvenard is! Think of it, messieurs! he would make us believe that the women adore him!"

"Well! why not?"

"Your nose is too much turned up; women like Roman noses. You can never look sentimental with a nose like a trumpet."

"So you think that a man must have a languorous, melancholy air, in order to make conquests, do you? Balloquet, you make me tired!"

"I'll give you points at that game whenever you choose, Fouvenard. We will take these gentlemen for judges. Tell the waiter to bring up six women,—of any condition and from any quarter, I don't care what one,—and we'll see which of us two they will prefer. What do you say?"

Young Balloquet's proposal aroused general laughter, and a gentleman who sat beside me observed to me:

"It might well be that the ladies wouldn't have anything to say to either of them. What do you think?"

"I think that any ladies who would consent to grace our dessert, at the behest of a waiter, would do it only on one condition; and men don't make a conquest of such women, as they give themselves to everybody."

"Parbleu! messieurs, it is very amiable of us to listen to this discussion between Fouvenard and Balloquet as to which of them a woman would think the uglier; for my part, I prefer to demand an explanation of what Rochebrune said just now. He talked a long while, and I've no doubt he said some very nice things; but as I didn't quite understand him, I request an explanation of the picture, or the key to the riddle, if there is one."

"Yes, yes, the key; for I didn't understand him, either."

"Well, I did; I followed his reasoning: he says that a man can love a dozen women at once."

"A dozen! why not thirty-six? What Turks you are, messieurs! Rochebrune didn't say that."

"Yes, I did. Isn't it true?"

"Messieurs, I desire the floor."

"You may talk in a minute, Montricourt—after Rochebrune."

"A toast first of all, messieurs!"

"Oh! of course! When the host proposes a toast, we should be boors if we refused to honor it.—Fill the cups, waiter!"

"This is very pretty, drinking champagne from cups; it recalls the banquets of antiquity—those famous feasts that Lucullus gave in the hall of Apollo, or of Mars."

"Yes! those old bucks knew how to dine; every one of his suppers cost Lucullus about thirty-nine thousand francs in our money."

"Bah! don't talk to me about your Romans, my dear fellow; I shall never take those people for models. They spent a lot of money for one repast, but that doesn't prove that they knew how to eat. In the first place, they lay on beds at the table! As if one could eat comfortably lying down! It's like eating on the grass, which is as unpleasant as can be; nobody likes eating on the grass but lovers, and they are thinking of something besides eating. As for your cups, they're pretty to look at, I agree, but they're less convenient for drinking than glasses, and the champagne doesn't foam so much in a cup; and then, you don't have the pleasure of making it foam all over again by striking your glass."

"Say what you will, Monsieur Rouffignard, the Romans knew how to live."

"Because they wore wreaths of roses at their meals, perhaps?"

"Well, it isn't so very unpleasant to have flowers on your head."

"Oh! don't talk to me, Monsieur Dumouton; let's all try wearing a wreath of roses, and you'll see what we look like—genuine buffoons, paraders, and nothing else!"

"Simply because our dress isn't suited to it, monsieur; our style of dress is very disobliging, it isn't suited to anything; with the tunic and cloak falling in graceful folds, the wreath on the head was not absurd. And the slaves who served the ambrosia—in *tableau vivant* costumes—weren't they attractive to the eye?"

"Oh, yes! slaves of both sexes! That was refined, and no mistake. I tell you that your Romans were infernal debauchees; they put up with—aye, cultivated all the vices! Why, monsieur, what do you say to the Senators who had the effrontery to propose a decree that Cæsar, then fifty-seven years of age, should possess all the women he desired?"

"'Ah! le joli droit! ah! le joli droit du seigneur!'"

"I would like right well to know if he made use of that right."

"*Fichtre!* he must have been a very great man!"

"Don't you know what used to be said of him: that he was the husband of all the women?"

"Yes, and we know the rest."

"I say, you, over there! Haven't you nearly finished talking about your Romans?"

"What about our host's toast?—Come, Dupréval, we're waiting; the guns are loaded, the matches lighted."

"Silence at the end of the table! Duprével is going to speak! Great God! what chatterers those fellows are!"

"It's not we, messieurs, that you hear; it's the music. Hark, listen! they're dancing; there are wedding parties all about us—two or three at least."

"What is there surprising in that? Aren't there always wedding feasts going on at Deffieux's?"

"For my part, if I kept a restaurant, and had such a class of patrons, I would take for my sign: the *Maid of Orléans.*"

"Oh! that would be very injudicious: many brides would refuse to have their wedding feasts at your place."

"Hush! Duprével is getting up; he's going to speak."

"As you know, messieurs, this is my last dinner party as a bachelor, for I am to be married in a fortnight. Before settling down, before becoming transformed into a sedate and virtuous mortal, I determined to get you all together; I wanted to enjoy once more with you a few of those moments of freedom and folly which have—a little too often, perhaps—marked my bachelor days with a white stone. Now, then, messieurs, as one should never be ungrateful, as one should bestow at least a single thought on those who have made one happy, I drink to my mistresses, messieurs, to whom I bid a last farewell to-day!"

"Here's to Duprével's mistresses!"

"And to our own, messieurs!"

"To the ladies in general, and to the one I love in particular!"

"To their shapely legs and little feet!"

"To their blue eyes and fair hair!"

"I prefer brunettes!"

"To their graceful figures!"

"To the Hottentot Venus!"

"To the destruction of corns on the feet!"

"Oh! of course, Balloquet has to make one of his foolish remarks!"

"Messieurs, pardon me for interrupting you, but, in proposing a toast to my mistresses, pray don't think that I mean to imply that I have several. I am no such rake as Rochbrune is, in that respect; one at a time is enough for me. I intended simply to address a parting thought to those I have had during the whole of my bachelor life. That point being settled, I now yield the floor to our friend, who, I believe, was about to reply to the questions that had been put to him, when I proposed my toast."

Thereupon the whole company turned their eyes toward me, for, I fancy, you understand that I am Rochebrune. Perhaps it would not be a bad idea for me to tell you at once what I was doing and in whose company I was at that moment, at Deffieux's. Indeed, there are people who would have begun with that, before introducing you to a dinner party at which the guests are still unknown to you; but I like to turn aside from the travelled roads—not from a desire to be original, but from taste.

What am I? Oh! not much of anything! For, after all, what does a man amount to who has not great renown, great talent, an illustrious reputation, or an immense fortune? A clown, a Liliputian, an atom lost in the crowd. But you will tell me that the world is made up in larger part of atoms than of giants, and that the main thing is not so much to fill a large space as to fill worthily such space as one does fill.

Unluckily, I was not wise enough for that. Having come into possession of a neat little fortune rather early in life,—about fifteen thousand francs a year,—but having

neither father nor mother to guide and advise me, I was left my own master rather too soon, I fancy; for while the reason matures quickly in adversity, the contrary is ordinarily true in the bosom of opulence.

You see some mere boys, who are compelled to work in order to support their families, exhibit the intelligence and courage of a full-grown man. But place those same youths in the lap of Fortune, and they will do all the foolish things that come into their heads. Why? Because, no doubt, it is natural to love pleasure; and when we are prudent and virtuous, it is very rarely due to our own volition, but rather to circumstances, and, above all, to adversity. Which proves that adversity has its good side. But, with your permission, we will return to myself.

My name is Charles Rochebrune. I am no longer young, having passed my thirtieth birthday. How time flies! it is shocking! to be thirty years old and no further advanced than I am! Indeed, instead of advancing, I believe that I have fallen back. At twenty I had fifteen thousand francs a year, and now I have but eight. If I go on like this, in a few years more I shall have nothing at all. But have I not acquired some experience, some talent, in return for my money? No experience, I fancy, as I constantly fall into the same errors I used to be guilty of years ago. And talent?—very little, I assure you! because I attempted to acquire all the talents, and could never make up my mind to rely on a single one. I had a vocation for the arts; the result was that I tried them all, and know a little something of each one; which means that I know nothing at all of any value. Painter, sculptor, musician, poet, in turn, I have grazed the surface of them all, but gone to the root of none. Ah! lamentable fickleness of taste, of character! No sooner

had I studied a certain thing a little while, than the fatal tendency to change, which is my second nature, caused me to turn my ambition toward some other object. I would say to myself: "I have made a mistake; it is not painting that electrifies me, that sets my soul on fire, but music."—And I would lay aside my brushes, to bang on a piano; and when I had made it shriek for an hour, I would imagine that I was a composer and could safely be employed to write an opera.

There is but one sentiment which has never varied, in my case, and that is my love for the ladies; and yet they say that in my relations with them I have retained my fondness for changing. But if one loves flowers, must one pluck only a single one? I love bouquets *à la jardinière.*

And, after all, who can say that I would not have been constant if I had found a woman who loved me dearly, and who continued to love me, no matter what happened? This last phrase means many things, which the ladies will readily understand. But I have one very great failing as to them. I will not confide it to you yet; you will discover it soon enough, as you become better acquainted with me.

I said a moment ago that my parents—that is to say, my father—left me some property. My mother had had two husbands, and I was the son of her second marriage. As she had nothing when she married my father, it is to him that I am indebted for the fortune which I have employed so ill hitherto.

But, after all, have I employed it so ill, if I have been happy? Ah! the fact is that I am not at all certain that I have been really happy in this life of dissipation, folly, incessant change, regrets, and hopes so often

disappointed. I determined to settle down, to do what is called making an end of things, which means marrying; albeit marriage is not always the end of our follies, and is often the beginning of our troubles. I loved my fiancée; I was not madly in love with her, but I liked her, and I thought that she was fond of me. An unforeseen occurrence broke off my projected marriage, and since then I have entirely renounced all such ideas, because a similar occurrence might have a similar result. What was it? Ah! that is my secret; I am not as yet intimate enough with you to tell you everything.

I seem to have been talking a long while about myself; you must be sadly bored. I propose now to make you acquainted with most of the gentlemen who were my table companions at Deffieux's; I say "most of them," for there were fifteen of us, and I did not know them all.

Let us begin with the host, Dupréval, who was giving the dinner, as he told us, to commemorate his final adieu to his bachelorhood.

Dupréval is a solicitor; an excellent fellow, neither handsome nor ugly, but a financier, a man of figures and calculations; he is entering into marriage as one enters into any large commercial speculation. He will certainly keep his word and abandon the follies of a bachelor, or I shall be very much astonished; he is a man who will make his way in the world; he has a goal—wealth; and he marches constantly toward it, never turning aside from the path.

I admire such men, unbending in their determination, and incapable of being turned aside from the line of conduct they have marked out for themselves; I admire them, but I shall never imitate them. Chance is such a fascinating thing, and it is such good fun to trust to it!

Next to Dupréval sat a stout young man, of medium height, but heavily built, high-colored, with the bloom and brilliancy of the peach ever on his cheeks. Unluckily, that never-failing freshness of complexion was his only beauty, if, indeed, such pronounced coloring is a beauty. His face beamed with good humor and denoted a leader in merrymaking; his mouth was a considerable gulf, and his eyes were infinitesimal; but, by way of compensation for occupying so little space, they were constantly in motion and very bright, their expression being decidedly bold when they rested upon the fair sex. His head was covered with a forest of flaxen hair. Such was Monsieur Balloquet, medical student; indeed, I believe he was a full-fledged doctor; but he had little practice, or, rather, none at all; he thought only of enjoying himself, like many doctors of his age. However, I do not mean to speak ill of Balloquet; for he was a very good fellow, and we were good friends.

Next to him was a young man of medium height, very thin, and with a very yellow complexion. An enormous beard, moustache, and whiskers covered so much of his face that one could see little more than his nose, which was long and thin, and his eyes, which were sunken and overshadowed by eyebrows that threatened to spread like his beard. This gentleman had an air of excessive weariness; that was all that one could make out beneath the chestnut shrubbery that had overgrown his face. His name was Fouvenard. I believe that he was in trade; but his business, whatever it was, seemed to have worn him out. But that fact did not prevent him from talking all the time of his past conquests and his present love affairs.

At my left was a rotund old party, with an amiable expression, and a full-blown, rubicund face. It was

Monsieur Rouffignard, auctioneer, who was no longer young, but held his own manfully with the young men. He did not lag behind at table; indeed, I have an idea that he did not lag behind anywhere.

The next beyond was a very good-looking young man named Montricourt. He had rather a self-sufficient air, and, if you did not know him well, you might have called him conceited; but on talking with him, you found him much more agreeable than his pretentious costume would lead you to suppose.

Next came a man of thirty-six to forty years of age, rather ugly than handsome, with a round face, smooth hair, a shifty eye, and an equivocal smile, who spoke very slowly, and always seemed to reflect upon what he was going to say. His tone was honeyed, and his manners excessively polite. He was a clerk at the Treasury, by name Monsieur Faisandé. When someone, at the beginning of the dinner, said a few words that were a trifle free in tone, I noticed that he frowned, as a lady might have done who had strayed among us by mistake. After drinking five or six different kinds of wine, he pursed his lips less; but at every loose word that escaped us,—and such things are inevitable at a men's dinner which has no diplomatic object,—Monsieur Faisandé exclaimed:

"Hum! hum! Oh! messieurs, that's a little too bad! you go too far!"

"I may be mistaken," I thought; "but I would stake my head that Monsieur Faisandé is a hypocrite. That offended modesty is, to say the least, out of place, and almost discourteous toward the rest of us; for it seems a criticism of our conversation. In heaven's name, did the man think that if he came to dinner with a party of men, most of them young, and all high livers, he would hear

no broad talk? There can be nothing so insufferable at a party as one of those people who seem determined to benumb your gayety by their sullen looks and their stiff manners. When such a person does appear in a merry company, he should be courteously turned out of doors."

What would you say of a doctor who should keep crying out during a dinner:

"Don't eat so much; you'll make yourself ill; don't take any of this, it's indigestible; don't drink any of that wine, it's too strong!"

No, indeed; at table the doctor disappears, or allows you to eat and drink anything; nobody can be more accommodating, even with his patients. And if doctors are so indulgent to the caprices of the stomach, by what right does a pedant or a hypocrite undertake to put my mind on a strict diet, and reprove the freedom of my conversation? There is an old proverb that says: "We must laugh with the fools;" or, if you please: "We must howl with the wolves."—Whence I conclude that it is, to say the least, in bad taste to appear shocked by a loose word or a vulgar jest, in such a company; and this Monsieur Faisandé's virtue seemed to be all the more doubtful because of his behavior.

In my review of the guests I must not forget Monsieur Dumouton, although I only knew him then from having been once or twice in his company. He was an individual who did not seem to be universally popular. Not that he had an unattractive physique; on the contrary, he was a tall, slender man, rather well than ill looking; his face was amiable, his strongly marked features did not lack character; his bright, black eyes and high color seemed to indicate a native of the *Midi*, although there was no

trace of such origin in his speech. But poor Monsieur Dumouton was always dressed in such strange fashion, that it was difficult, on glancing at his costume, to avoid forming a melancholy opinion of his resources.

Imagine a threadbare coat, once green, but beginning to turn yellow, and made after the style of a dozen years before—that is to say, very short in front; in truth, it was also short in the skirts, which were very scant, and hardly hid the seat of his trousers, which were olive green and only just reached to his ankles, and fitted as close about the thigh and knee as a rope dancer's tights. His boots were always innocent of blacking, but, by way of compensation, were often coated with mud. Add to all this a plaid waistcoat, double-breasted, and buttoned to the chin; a black cravat, twisted into a rope; no shirt, collar, or gloves; and a beard that was usually of about three days' growth: such was Monsieur Dumouton's ordinary costume.

You will assume, perhaps, that he had donned other clothes to dine with us; if so, you would make a mistake: it seemed that he was not fond of change. Perhaps he had his reasons for that. However, he had made some slight ameliorations: he had a false collar, and a white muslin cravat, the ends of which were tied in a large knot that stood out conspicuously against the soiled background formed by the coat and waistcoat.

I cannot tell why it was that I imagined I had seen that cravat playing the part of draw-curtain at a window; it was an unkind thought, I confess, and I did my utmost to discard it; but, as you must know, evil thoughts are more persistent than good ones; and whenever my eyes fell on the ends of that enormous cravat, it seemed to me that I was sitting by a window.

I must tell you now who this gentleman was who dressed so ill. You will be greatly surprised to learn that he was an author—yes, a "truly author," as the children say; a man who wrote his plays himself,—especially as he had not the wherewithal to buy any,—and plays which were often very pretty, and which had been acted, and were being acted still, with success.

But, you will tell me, we have passed the time when men of letters, dramatic authors, earned barely enough to keep them alive; to-day, the stage sometimes leads to wealth even; but it does not follow by any means that all the nurslings of the Muses are destined to acquire wealth. One may be unfortunate, dissipated, reckless; and once in the mire, it is hard to extricate one's self therefrom, unless one has a firm, immovable determination, unbounded courage, and a still greater capacity for work; and everybody has not these. I cannot say what had been the trouble with Monsieur Dumouton, what reverses he had had; I did not know just how he was placed at that time; but, judging from his costume, it was impossible to escape the supposition that he had known adversity. Moreover, a few words that Dupréval let fall concerning this man of letters recurred to my memory. He always said, when Dumouton was mentioned:

"Poor fellow! he has all he can do to keep body and soul together! He has plenty of intelligence, too; but he's such a careless devil!"

Whence I concluded that Dumouton was a penniless author; I do not say, a worthless author. However, I was delighted to be in his company; for he was jovial, clever, and entirely free from conceit; so what did I care for his threadbare coat? I saw around the table several

handsomely dressed men, who amounted to nothing under their fine clothes.

I have introduced you now to all of my companions who were not strangers to me; as for the others—why, if they say anything that makes it worth our while to listen to them, we shall not fail to hear it.

II

THE CHAPTER OF CONFIDENCES.—THREE SOUS

I have told you that all eyes were fixed on me, and that everybody was waiting to hear what I might have to say in justification or explanation of what I had advanced on the subject of men who love several women at once. For my part, I admit that, far from thinking about what reply I should make to those gentlemen, I was busily engaged in watching Dumouton, who was stowing away the contents of all the dessert plates within his reach, although he was not eating. When he could find nothing else on the plates that were near him, he attacked one of those pasteboard structures, usually covered with candies or small cakes, which no one ever touches, because they are intended simply as decorations for the table, and one of them often does duty for several months. I saw one of the waiters glare at him furiously when he saw what he was doing, and I said to myself:

"I wonder if that poor Dumouton is in the same position as Frédérick Lemaître in *Le Joueur*, when he stuffs bread into his pocket, saying: 'For my family!'"

"Well, Rochebrune! are you going to speak to-day?" said Dupréval.

"What do you mean?"

"What you were going to tell us."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, messieurs! You see, the wine we have drunk has confused my memory, and I should find it hard to recall what I said to you just now. And, to tell you the truth, instead of making speeches about the best way of loving, which never prove anything, because every man loves in his own way, which is the best to his mind, it seems to me that it would be much more amusing for each of us to tell about one of his *bonnes fortunes*, old or new, according to his pleasure.—What do you say, messieurs?"

My suggestion was welcomed by enthusiastic plaudits; only Monsieur Faisandé made a wry face, and muttered:

"The deuce, messieurs, tell one of our *bonnes fortunes!* Why, that's a very delicate subject. I didn't suppose that such things were talked about, as a general rule. Discretion, messieurs, is the duty of an honorable man, and, above all, of a lady's man."

"Oh! bless my soul, Monsieur Faisandé, if you don't mention any names, there's no indiscretion; and, as we are entitled to go back to ancient history, how in the devil are you going to recognize the characters?"

"This Monsieur Faisandé is very austere and very modest," murmured my neighbor, the bulky Rouffignard. "He is very foolish to venture with ne'er-do-wells of our temper."

"Especially," said Montricourt, "as the fellow's a great nuisance."

"Well, then, messieurs, Rochebrune's suggestion being adopted, who's to begin?"

"Parbleu! yourself, Dupréval; the honor is yours."

"Very good. Then it will be my right-hand neighbor's turn, and so on around the table."

Dupréval emptied his glass, to put himself into a more suitable disposition for telling his story. Meanwhile, I watched Dumouton, who had entirely stripped one ornament and persistently kept his hands out of sight under the table. As some of the guests continued to converse, Dupréval struck his glass with his knife and cried:

"Silence, messieurs!"

Everybody ceased talking, took a drink, and prepared to listen to the host, who began thus:

"At that time, messieurs, I was a third-class clerk to a solicitor, and my pockets were seldom well lined. My father gave me six francs a week for pocket money; as you may imagine, my diversions were very few, and I often spent my whole allowance on Sunday; then I was obliged either to procure my amusement gratis during the week, or to abstain entirely; the latter alternative, I believe, is disagreeable at any age.

"One fine day—or rather, one evening—I was at the play, and found myself behind two very pretty grisettes—there were grisettes in those days; unluckily, they are now vanishing from the face of the earth, like poodles and melon raisers. For my part, I regret them exceedingly—not the melon raisers or the poodles, but the grisettes; they are replaced nowadays by lorettes, who can't hold a candle to them. Our friend Dumouton, by the way, has done a very amusing little sketch on grisettes, lorettes, and fillettes, which I will request him to repeat to you in a moment, and——"

"Question!"

"The speaker is not keeping to his subject."

"That is true, messieurs. Excuse me.—Well, I was at the play, behind two grisettes, and I had only three sous in my pocket; that was all I had left after buying my ticket, and it was Monday. Such was my plight. However, that didn't prevent me from making eyes at one of the damsels, whose saucy face attracted me. For her part, she responded promptly to my glances; the firing was well maintained on both sides, and seemed to promise a very warm engagement. I opened a conversation, and she answered. The young ladies were not prudes, by any means; they laughed heartily at every joke that I indulged in, and I indulged in a good many; I was in funds in that respect only.

"It was summer, and the theatre was very warm. Several times my grisettes had wiped their faces, crying:

"'Dieu! how hot it is!'

"'How I would like a good, cool drink!'

"'That's so; something cool and refreshing would go to the spot, pure or with water.'

"When they expressed themselves in such terms, I made a pretence of looking about the house, humming unconcernedly. With my three sous, I could have given each of them a stick of barley sugar, but that is hardly refreshing. I remember that an orange girl persisted in walking back and forth in front of us, and in holding her basket under my nose, and that I trod on her foot so hard that the poor girl turned pale and hurried away, shrieking.

"At last the play came to an end, and my grisettes went out; I went with them, still talking, but taking care to fall behind when we passed a café. They did not live together; and when I was alone with the one to whom I was particularly attentive, I obtained a rendezvous for the next day, at nightfall.

"When the next day came, I was no richer, for my office mates were, for the most part, as hard up as I. However, I was faithful to my appointment, all the same, still with my three sous in my pocket.

"My charmer was on time. I walked her about the streets at least two hours. She remarked from time to time that she was tired; but, instead of replying, I would passionately squeeze one of her hands, and the heat of my love made her forget her fatigue. Unluckily, she lived with an old relation—of which sex I don't know; I do know that that fact made it impossible for me to go to her room, and I had to leave her at her door.

"The next evening, at dusk, we met again. I had the shrewdness to take her outside the barrier; it was a superb night, and we strolled along the new boulevards. I tried to coax her out into the country; she refused, on the ground that she was tired. She expected me to suggest a cab, no doubt, but I knew better.

"The next day, another rendezvous. My grisette wanted to go to the Jardin des Plantes. When we came to Pont d'Austerlitz, I had to spend two of my three sous, and for tolls, not for refreshment; that seemed cruel, but there was no alternative. We strolled a long while around the garden, which is an admirable place for lovers, because some of the paths are always deserted; my conquest was affable and sentimental, but I replied all awry to what she said and to the questions she asked. I was haunted by a secret apprehension; I was thinking about going home, about Pont d'Austerlitz, which she would certainly insist on crossing again, as it was the shortest way to her house; and I said to myself: 'I have only five centimes left. Shall I pay for her and let her go alone? Shall I make her take another route? Or shall

I run across at full speed and defy the tollman?'—Neither plan seemed to promise well, and you can imagine that my mind was in a turmoil; so that my young companion kept saying to me:

"'What on earth are you thinking about, monsieur? You don't answer my questions; you seem to be thinking about something besides me. You're not very agreeable this evening.'

"I did my utmost to be talkative, attentive, and gallant; but, in a few minutes, my preoccupation returned. At last my grisette, irritated by my behavior, declared that she wanted to go home, that she was tired of walking, that I had walked her about so much the last two or three days that her heels were swollen as badly as when she used to have chilblains. So she dragged me away toward the exit. That was the decisive moment. I began to talk about going home another way that I knew about, which was much pleasanter than the way we had come. But my grisette took her turn at not listening, and when we were out of the garden, and I tried to lead her to the left, she hung back.

"'Why, where are you going?' she cried.

"'I assure you that it's much pleasanter and shorter by the other bridge.'

"'You're joking, I suppose! the idea of going back through narrow streets instead of the boulevards! Monsieur is making fun of me!'

"I couldn't possibly prevail upon her; she dropped my arm and made straight for the bridge.

"'Well!' I said to myself, with a sigh; 'there's nothing left for me to do.'

"I followed her. When she reached the tollman, I tossed my last sou on the table and said to my charmer:

"'Go on, I will follow you.'

"She crossed the bridge, supposing that some natural cause detained me a moment. Meanwhile, I gazed at the river, considering whether I would jump in and swim to the other bank. But I'm not a fine swimmer, and I did not feel as brave as Leander, although the Seine is narrower than the Hellespont. Instead of swimming, I ran along the quays to the next bridge; when I got there, I was almost out of breath, but that did not prevent me from running across the bridge, then back along the Seine to the beginning of Boulevard Bourdon. But that is quite a long distance, and, although I ran almost all the way, it took quite a long time. I arrived at last, but I looked in vain for my inamorata; I could not find her. Tired of waiting for me, or piqued by my failure to overtake her, she had evidently gone home alone.

"The next day, I went to our usual place of meeting, but she did not come. I waited there for her several days—to no purpose; and at last I wrote to her, requesting a reply. She sent me a very laconic one: 'You made a fool of me,' she wrote; 'and after walking my legs off for four days, as if I was an omnibus horse, you left me in the middle of a bridge. I've had enough of it, monsieur; you won't take me to walk any more.'—And thus that intrigue came to an end; for I never saw my grisette again; but I haven't forgotten the adventure. Let it serve you as a lesson, messieurs, if you should ever happen to find yourselves with only three sous in your pocket."

III

BLIND-MAN'S-BUFF.—AT THE WINDOWS.—IN A BALLOON

Dupréval's tale amused the company immensely. Monsieur Dumouton, who was better able, perhaps, than any of the rest of us, to understand our friend's plight, exclaimed:

"Oh! that's true! it's very dangerous to take any chances in a lady's company, if you haven't any money in your pocket! It's a thing I always avoid."

It was young Balloquet's turn. The bulky, fair-haired man opened his mouth as if he were going to sing an operatic aria, and began:

"Dupréval has just told us of an adventure which was not a *bonne fortune*, messieurs, for it didn't end happily for him; I propose to tell you of one that can fairly be called a genuine A-Number-One *bonne fortune*. It happened at a *fête champêtre* given by a friend of mine at his charming country place in the outskirts of Sceaux."

"Don't name the place," Monsieur Faisandé interrupted; "there's no need of it, and it might betray the originals of your story."

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Faisandé, you seem to be terribly afraid of disclosures. Is it because you fear your excellent wife may be involved?"

The Treasury clerk turned as red as a poppy.

"I don't know why you indulge in jests of that sort, Monsieur Balloquet," he cried; "it's very bad taste, monsieur!"

"Then let me speak, monsieur, and don't keep putting your oar into our conversation; your mock-modest air doesn't deceive anybody. People who make such a show of decorum, and who are so strict in their language, are often greater libertines and rakes than those whose language they censure."

Monsieur Faisandé's cheeks changed from the hue of a poppy to that of a turnip; but he made no reply, and looked down at his plate, which led us to think that Balloquet had hit the mark. The latter resumed his story:

"As I was saying, I was at a magnificent open-air fête. There were some charming women there, and among them one with whom I had been in love a long while, but had been able to get no further than to whisper a burning word in her ear now and then; for she had a husband, who, while he was not jealous, was always at his wife's side. The dear man was very much in love with his wife, and bored her to death with his caresses. Sometimes he forgot himself so far as to kiss her before company, which was execrable form; and by dint of sentimentality and caresses he had succeeded in making himself insufferable to her. Yes, messieurs, this goes to prove what I said just now to Fouvenard: women don't like to be loved too much. *Excess in any direction is a mistake.* Moreover, nothing makes a man look so foolish as a superabundance of love. Well, while we were playing games and strolling about the gardens, Monsieur Three-Stars—I'll call him Three-Stars, which will not compromise anybody, I fancy—kissed his wife again before the whole company; and she flew into a rage and made a scene with him, forbidding him to come near her again during the evening. The fond husband was in despair, and cudgelled his brains to think of some means

of becoming reconciled to his wife. After long consideration, he took me by the arm and said:

"'My dear Monsieur Balloquet, I believe I have found what I was looking for.'

"'Have you lost something?' said I.

"'You don't understand. I am trying to think of some way to compel my wife to let me kiss her, and it is very difficult, because she is cross with me now. But this is what I have thought of: I am going to suggest a game of blind-man's-buff, and I will ask to be *it*, on condition that I may kiss the person I catch, when I guess who it is. When I catch my wife, be good enough to cough, so as to let me know; in that way I shall not make a mistake, and she'll have to let me kiss her.'

"I warmly applauded Monsieur Three-Stars's plan; his idea of blind-man's-buff seemed to me very amusing. He made his proposition, it was accepted, and he was blindfolded. Now, while he groped his way about, the rest of the party thought it would be a good joke to leave him there and go to another part of the garden. I escorted Madame Three-Stars. The garden was very extensive, with grottoes and labyrinths and some extremely dark clumps of shrubbery. I will not tell you just where I took the lady, but our walk was quite long; and when we returned to our starting point, the poor husband was still groping about with the handkerchief over his eyes. When he heard us coming, he hurried toward us; I coughed,—to give him that satisfaction was the least I could do,—he named his wife and kissed her. Then, delighted with his idea, he replaced the handkerchief over his eyes, requesting to be *it* again. We acceded to his wish, and he was *it* three times in succession. That, messieurs, is what I call a *bonne fortune*."

"Your story is exactly after the style of Boccaccio!" laughed Montricourt.—"If this goes on, messieurs, we shall be able to publish a sequel to the *Decameron*."

"It's Fouvenard's turn."

The hairy gentleman passed his hand across his forehead, saying:

"I am searching my memory, messieurs. I have had so many adventures! I am afraid of mixing them up. You see, it's like calling on a man for a ballad who has written a great many; he doesn't know any, because he knows too many. I beg you to be good enough to leave me till the last; meanwhile, I will disentangle my memories and try to select something choice, with a Regency flavor."

"All right! Fouvenard passes the bank on to Monsieur Reffort.—Go on, Reffort."

Reffort was a personage who had not said four words during the dinner, but had contented himself with laughing idiotically at what the others said. He was the possessor of a more than insignificant face, and turned as red as fire when he was addressed. He rolled his eyes over the dessert, played with his knife, and murmured at last:

"Faith! messieurs, it embarrasses me to speak, because—I must admit that—on my word of honor, it has never happened to me."

"What's that, Reffort? It has never happened to you! What in the devil do you mean by that? Explain yourself."

"Can it be that Monsieur Reffort is as a man what Jeanne d'Arc was as a woman?" cried Rouffignard. "In that case, I demand that he be cast in a mould, that a statuette be made of him and sold for the benefit of the Société de Tempérance."

Roars of laughter arose on all sides. Monsieur Reffort laughed with the rest, albeit with a somewhat annoyed air, and rejoined:

"You go too far, messieurs; I didn't mean what you think, but simply that I am not a man for love intrigues. I shouldn't know how to go about it; and, faith! when my thoughts turn to love, there are priestesses of Venus, and——"

"Very good, Monsieur Reffort; we don't ask for anything more; we'll call that *bonnes fortunes* for cash. Next."

"Messieurs," said the gentleman who came next, in a sentimental tone, "the best day of my life was that on which I stole a garter at a wedding party, at Prés-Saint-Gervais—I made a mistake as to the leg; but I saw such a pretty one, and took it for the bride's. In fact, I didn't want to go out from under the table. Unluckily, that charming limb belonged to a lady of fifty; but she was kind enough to make me a present of her garter."

"And you have worn it on your heart ever since?"

"No; but I have kept it under glass. That's my only *bonne fortune!*"

"I, messieurs," said a young man, who sat next to the last speaker, "was shut up once for twelve hours in a closet full of bottles of liqueurs; and when my mistress was able at last to release me, I was dead drunk; I had tasted everything, to pass the time away. Finding me in that condition, the lady was obliged to send for a messenger, who took me on his back like a bale, and on the way downstairs let me roll down one whole flight. Since then I have had a horror of *bonnes fortunes.*"

"Your turn, Raymond."

"I once fell in love with a lady who roomed opposite me. As you can imagine, I was always hanging out

of my window. She was very pretty, but she didn't reply to my glances; indeed, she often left her window when I appeared at mine. But I wasn't discouraged by that. I followed her everywhere: in the street, in omnibuses, to the theatre; I wrote her twenty notes, but she didn't answer them, and my persistence seemed to offend her rather than to touch her heart. As I could think of nothing else to do, I determined one day to try to make her jealous. I interviewed one of the damsels to whom Monsieur Reffort alluded, and, for a consideration, she came to my rooms one afternoon. I placed her on my balcony, so that she might be in full view; I urged her to behave decently, and retired to await the result of my experiment.

"My neighbor appeared at her window. It was impossible for her not to see my damsel. I was enchanted, and said to myself: 'She sees that I am with another, and she will surely be annoyed.' Moreover, the young woman I had hired was very pretty and might pass for a creditable conquest, having, in accordance with my orders, clothed herself in a very stylish gown. But imagine my sensations when she began to smoke an enormous cigar, a genuine panetela! I tried to remonstrate; she answered that it was good form. I had become resigned to the cigar, when she suddenly called out to a young man who passed along the street: 'Monsieur Ernest, don't expect me to pose for you as Venus to-morrow. I am posing here, where I get double pay, and don't have to be all naked as I do at your studio, where I'm always catching cold in the head and other places.'

"Judge of my despair! my neighbor must have heard, for she laughed till she cried. You can imagine that I dismissed my *poseuse* instantly. But see what strange

creatures women are! For the next few days, I was so depressed and shamefaced that I dared not show myself at my window. Well! then it was that my neighbor deigned at last to answer one of my notes, and I became the happiest of men."

"We might call that the 'window intrigue.'—Now, Roland."

Monsieur Roland was a young blade with enormous whiskers, and all the self-possession and *frou-frou* of a commercial traveller. He threw out his chest when he began to speak.

"I adored a lady who resisted my advances, messieurs. One day I succeeded in inducing her to go up in a balloon with me. When we were once in the air, I said to her: 'My dear love, if you continue to be cruel, I'll cut a hole in the balloon, and it will be all over with both of us.'—My charmer ceased to resist me, and I assure you, messieurs, that it's very pleasant to make love among the clouds."

"I call for an encore for that."

"And I am wondering whether Roland always has a balloon at his disposal, already inflated, to enable him to triumph over women who try to resist him."

"What, messieurs! do you doubt the truth of my story?"

"On the contrary, it is delicious," said Montricourt; "I am simply trying to think of one that would be worthy to serve as a pendant to your balloon."

"For my part, messieurs," said a tall man with blue spectacles, "as I am very near-sighted, my *bonnes fortunes* have almost always ended unfortunately. When I had been attentive to a young woman, if I went to see her the next day, I was sure to throw myself at her mother's

knees and say sweet things to her, thinking that I was talking to the daughter. However, one day, a lady, to whom I had been paying court with marked ardor, consented to come to breakfast with me. Imagine my delight! But she said to me: 'For heaven's sake, don't keep on your spectacles, for I think you are frightfully ugly in them; I detest spectacles.'—To satisfy her, after ordering the daintiest of breakfasts and donning the most elegant costume you can imagine, I took off my spectacles and awaited the visit that was to make me the happiest of mortals. At last there was a knock at my door. I ran to open it, holding my arms in front of me, for I could see almost nothing at all, being short-sighted to the last degree; but I was certain that it was a woman who came in, because I touched her dress. I didn't give her time to speak to me—I was so madly in love! I took her in my arms; she tried to cry out, and I stifled her shrieks with my kisses. Not until it was too late did I hear her voice saying:

"'Mon Dieu! monsieur, whatever's the matter with you this morning? You must have swallowed a fulminating powder!'

"Impressed by the accent of that voice, I ran for my spectacles and put them on. Imagine my wrath! I had insulted my concierge! The excellent woman had brought me a letter from my fair one saying that it was impossible for her to come. Since then, I beg you to believe that I have never made love without my spectacles."

This tale called forth hearty laughter. Then a stout party told us at great length that his wife had been his only *bonne fortune.*

We all blessed that gentleman, who well deserved the Cross and our esteem.

IV

THE LOST KEY

Monsieur Faisandé's turn having arrived, he reflected, assumed a solemn expression, and held forth thus:

"Love, messieurs, is not such an entertaining, enjoyable, happy-go-lucky affair as you all seem to think. Most of you seek to enter into an intrigue solely to amuse yourselves; but the results, messieurs, all the results that may ensue from cohabitation between a man and a woman, from the carnal sin, from——"

"I was perfectly sure that Monsieur Faisandé would be more indecent than the rest of us when he began upon this subject," said Balloquet; "he has a way of preaching morality that would make a *vivandière* blush."

"I should be very glad to know what you consider unseemly in my language, Monsieur Balloquet?"

"Your language is excellently well chosen; it is technical; but you produce the effect of a medical book on me; they are most estimable works in themselves, but young women mustn't be allowed to read them. Pray go on, Monsieur Faisandé; I am terribly sorry that I interrupted you, you were beginning so well!"

The Treasury clerk pursed his lips and continued, emphasizing every word:

"I have never had any *bonnes fortunes*, messieurs; and I don't propose to begin now that I am married."

"What a hypocrite!" muttered my stout neighbor. "I don't know the fellow's wife, but I pity her; for I

am convinced that she has a mighty poor fellow for a husband."

"What, Monsieur Faisandé! not even some trivial little bit of fooling to tell us? Come, search your memory, did nothing ever happen to you in the Cité? in Rue aux Fèves or Rue Saint-Éloy? There are plenty of frail damsels on those streets, they say."

This time Monsieur Faisandé turned green; he did not know which way to look, and stammered a few inaudible words. Duprével, observing his evident discomfort, and wishing to put an end to a scene which threatened to lose its comic aspect, hastily asked Montricourt to take the floor.

The dandy smoothed the nascent beard that adorned his chin, then said in a low voice, assuming a serious air:

"What I am about to tell you, messieurs, may seem improbable to you. Understand that I have had a pair of wings made—yes, messieurs, a pair of wings as magnificent as an eagle's. I fasten them under my arms, and then, as you can imagine, I go wherever I choose. When a woman attracts me, I fly in at her window, even if she lives on the fifth floor; I carry her off, and I win her in mid-air! It's a wonderful thing!"

"I beg your pardon," said Monsieur Roland, ironically; "while you are making love in mid-air, you can't keep your wings at work; so you must fall. Look at the birds; they always light to do their billing and cooing."

"I anticipated that difficulty, my dear fellow; so, before I launch myself in the air, I always make myself fast to your balloon, which holds me up."

This witticism ranged all the laughers on Montricourt's side, and even Monsieur Roland decided to admit defeat.

It was now the turn of Monsieur Rouffignard, the corpulent bon vivant who sat next to me.

"My story won't be long," he said; "I rush my love affairs through on time; I don't like to have things drag along. I was in love with a woman who wasn't handsome, but had a fine figure; and I'm a great fellow for shape; I tell you, I set store by shape! To speak without periphrasis, I prefer what's underneath to what's outside. Well! I was making love to a lady who had little to boast of in the way of features; but such a superb bust! such well-rounded hips! I said to myself: 'If all that's only as firm and hard as a plum pudding, it will be all right; for, after all, one can't expect to find marble unless he goes to a statue.'—I would have been glad to have a chance to appraise, by means of a slight caress, more or less innocent, the real value of what I admired, but my inamorata didn't understand that sort of play; as soon as I made a motion to touch her, she'd shriek and wriggle and scratch. 'I shall never triumph over such untamed virtue as this,' I said to myself. But one fine day—that is to say, one evening, she agreed to meet me. She gave me leave to call between ten and eleven. I took good care to be prompt. Madame lived alone. She opened the door herself, and admitted me; but I was surprised to find that she had no light. I presumed that it was simply excess of modesty, and that defeat in the dark would be less trying to her; I had the more reason to think so, because she offered only a slight resistance. I began to grow audacious, but fancy my disappointment; instead of what I had hoped to find, I found nothing but *cliquettes*—that is to say, bones, of different degrees of sharpness. My audacity gave place to alarm; I recalled the romance of the *Monk*, and the story of *La Nonne Sanglante;* I began to be afraid that I was alone with a skeleton. But I had in my pocket one of those devices which we smokers use

to obtain a light. I lighted it, without warning my fair; she shrieked when she saw the flame, and I did the same when I found that I was tête-à-tête with a beanpole. All I had admired was false. I alleged a sudden indisposition, and fled. Since then, whenever that lady meets me, she glares at me as if she would strike me dead. I am very sorry for her, but one shouldn't pretend to be a millionaire when one doesn't own a single foot of ground."

It was my turn to relate my adventures. I have had amusing ones and sad ones; but, presuming that the sentimental sort would be misplaced on that occasion, I determined on this:

"The scene is laid in the country, messieurs, in a delightful region about five leagues from Paris. I had gone there to pass a fortnight with a friend of mine who has a house in that neighborhood; he had consumption, and was living on milk exclusively; so I leave you to guess whether the establishment was a lively one. However, one should be willing sometimes to make sacrifices to friendship. And then, too, there was a house near by, occupied by several tenants, among them a charming young widow whom I had met in society in Paris. She was a blonde, with tender blue eyes and a languishing smile, and an expert coquette, I assure you! You will say that all women are; but there are gradations. I renewed my acquaintance with her; in the country, as you have lots of time to yourself, love does its work much more quickly than in town; and then, the delicious shade, the verdure, the charming retired nooks where you can hear nothing but the twittering of birds—are not all these made to incline one's heart to sentiment, to invite to love? A welcome invitation, which it is so pleasant to hear! In a word, I made such progress with my lovely widow,

that nothing remained but to obtain a tête-à-tête. That, however, was not so easy as you may think. The house where my blonde lived was occupied by a lot of inquisitive, gossiping, evil-tongued people, whose greatest delight was to busy themselves about what others were doing. That is the principal occupation of fools in the country; they get up in the morning to spy on their neighbors, and do not go to bed happy if they have not done or said some spiteful thing during the day. My attentions to the pretty widow had been remarked; so they instantly passed the word around to watch us, to dog our steps; she and I could not move, without the whole province knowing it. All those bourgeois and clowns of the pumpkin family were worthy to be policemen in Paris; and I thought seriously of recommending them to monsieur le préfet.

"The result was that we had to act with great secrecy. The house where my widow lived had a large garden. All gardens have a small gate; and each tenant was supplied with a key to the little gate of the garden in question, which opened into a lovely meadow. Several times, when talking with my inamorata in the evening, I had urged her to give me her key, so that I could get into the garden. By waiting until midnight, I was certain to avoid meeting any of her fellow boarders, for all of them went to bed at ten o'clock, as a rule. My constant refrain was: 'Let me have the key; or else let me in at midnight.'

"At last, one evening when we had met at a neighbor's, as we left the house my blonde came to me, took my hand, and whispered in my ear:

"'Come to-night.'

"Imagine my joy, my ecstasy! I walked quickly away from her, lest she should change her mind. Everybody

went home, myself with the rest; I longed so for the time when they should all be asleep! My friend's old cuckoo clock struck twelve. I left my room at once, stepping lightly, stole from the house, and hastened to the meadow. I sat down on the grass, a few steps from the gate, and waited impatiently until it should open to admit me to the summit of felicity.

"Half an hour passed, and the gate did not open. I said to myself: 'Someone near her has not gone to bed yet, I suppose, and she's afraid to come down; I must be patient.'—Another half-hour passed and the gate remained closed. I stood up, thinking that she might have left it unlocked so that I could go in. I ran to the gate to find out, but it was locked on the inside. I walked back and forth, I sat down and stood up, keeping my eyes always fixed on that gate, which did not open. I thought of everything that could possibly have delayed my lovely widow, or kept her from coming. One o'clock struck, then the half, then two.—'She has made a fool of me,' I said to myself; 'she won't come at all! But what object could she possibly have in keeping me waiting all night? Does my love deserve such a cruel disappointment? In fact, did she not, of her own motion, tell me to come to-night? No, it isn't possible that she purposely makes me pass such wretched hours here.'

"I could not make up my mind to go. Still hoping, I said to myself at the faintest sound: 'She's coming; here she is!'—But the sound ceased, and she did not appear. Thereupon I would walk away a few steps, but again and again I returned.

"Day broke at last, and with it my last hope vanished! For people rise very early in the country, and, when it was light, I knew very well that the lady would not risk

her reputation by coming out to me. So I returned to my friend's house, with despair in my heart, swearing that I would never again address, that I would never look at, that woman who had made such a fool of me.

"But the next day, chance, or rather our own volition, brought us together. I was on the point of heaping reproaches on her, but she gave me no time; with a wrathful glance, she said to me in a voice that shook with indignation:

"'Your conduct is shameful, monsieur: the idea of making sport of me so! of making me pass a whole night in the most intense anxiety! For I had the kindness to believe that something must have happened to you; but I was mistaken. Why, in heaven's name, did you ask for a thing which you did not want? It is perfectly shocking! I detest you, and I forbid you ever to speak to me again!'

"You can imagine my amazement at this harangue. Instead of apologizing, I overwhelmed her with complaints and reproaches for the sleepless night I had passed at the garden gate. My manner was so genuine and so sincere, that the young widow interrupted me.—'What!' she exclaimed; 'you passed the night in the fields? Pray, why didn't you come in, monsieur?'

"'Come in? by what means, madame?'

"'Why, with the key to the little gate, which I myself gave you.'

"'You gave me the key?'

"'Yes, monsieur; last night, when I spoke to you, I put it in your hand.'

"Everything was explained. I remembered perfectly that when she whispered to me she had taken my hand; and that was when she gave me the key—or, rather, when

she thought that I received it; but, alas! she was mistaken; the key fell noiselessly on the grass, and neither of us noticed it. You see, messieurs, what trifles happiness depends upon. I asked pardon and claimed another assignation; but with women a lost opportunity is seldom recovered.—'Try to find the key,' she said. I hastened to the place where she had spoken to me the night before. Alas! in vain did I scratch the ground and examine every tuft of grass; I did not find the key. A few days later, the pretty blonde went away, and I never saw her again."

V

FILLETTES, GRISETTES, AND LORETTES

I had performed my task; Dumouton and Fouvenard alone remained to be heard. The latter having requested the privilege of speaking last, the man of letters in the yellowish-green coat bowed gracefully and began:

"To speak of one's *bonnes fortunes*, messieurs, is to speak of the ladies; with me, it is to speak of fillettes, grisettes, or lorettes; for as to bourgeois dames or great ladies, married or single, I have always deemed them too virtuous to be the objects of my attachment. That is my individual opinion; opinions are free. Allow me, therefore, to indulge in a brief digression concerning fillettes, grisettes, and lorettes. I know that my colleague, Alexandre Dumas, has discussed this subject; but there are subjects that are inexhaustible—always attractive and interesting: women and love enjoy that blessed privilege.

"It has been said that Paris is the paradise of women. Ah! messieurs, he who said that can never have visited the tiny chambers, the closets, the attics, sometimes even the garrets, where that charming sex often lacks the first essentials of life; sometimes by its own fault, sometimes by the fault of destiny, or, to speak more accurately, of those cruel monsters of men, who play so important a part in the story of these young women.

"The *fillettes* of Paris are the daughters of honest bourgeois or artisans, whose parents, too much engrossed by their labor or by the care of their business, put them out as apprentices, or as shopgirls, or, as happens in the majority of cases, leave them at home to look after the housework and keep house.

"Imagine a girl of fourteen to sixteen years of age, taken from her school, and, all of a sudden, because her father has become a widower, or because her mother sits at a counter all day, burdened with the whole charge of the household. She has no maid to assist her; for if she had, she would be a *demoiselle*, not a *fillette*. The *demoiselles* have had a good education, they have had teachers who have tried to enlighten their minds and their judgment and to train their hearts; indeed, they are supposed to know a great many things; but they are entitled to do nothing at all during the day, just because they are *demoiselles*.

"The fillettes, on the contrary, have to do everything, and generally are taught nothing. But you should see how they manage the household that has been thrown on their hands—mere children, who were playing with their dolls yesterday. Ordinarily, they begin by sweeping, very early; but if the lodging consists only of a single room and a cabinet, the housework is never finished till

the end of the day—when it is finished at all. To be sure, the fillette doesn't work long at any one thing; she is required to change her occupation every minute; indeed, it rarely happens that she dresses herself entirely. The young woman whom you meet on the street early in the morning, carelessly dressed, in shoes down at heel, with unkempt hair, dirty hands, and a modest manner, is a fillette.

"She has just begun to sweep, and suddenly she drops the broom, which sometimes falls against a pane of glass and breaks it; but the young housekeeper doesn't mind that. She starts to remove her curl papers; she removes one, she removes two—but just as she has her hand on the third, she remembers that she hasn't skimmed the stew; so she abandons her hair, runs to get the skimmer, and brandishes that utensil, humming Guido's song:

"'Hélas! il a fui comme une ombre!'

And to give more expression to her song, more passion to her voice, she often holds the skimmer lovingly to her heart. But as she sings, her eyes happen to fall on her canary's cage; she hastens thither, for she remembers that she hasn't given the bird anything to eat for two days. But as she is on the point of opening the cage, it occurs to her that she would do well to think about her own breakfast; so she turns her back on the canary, to go and visit the pantry. What she finds there does not suit her; so she goes down to the fruit stall to buy some fresh eggs. But on the way, she changes her mind; she prefers preserves, so she goes into the grocer's, where she meets a young woman who has been her schoolmate. They chat, and sometimes the chance meeting carries them a long way.

"'Come with me a minute,' says her friend; 'I live close by, and I'll show you a dress my fiancé sent me from Lyon.'

"'Oh! so you've got a fiancé, have you? are you going to be married?'

"'Yes, in two months.'

"'That's funny.'

"'Why is it funny?'

"'Because they don't ever think about marrying me.'

"'You're too young.'

"'I'm only a year younger'n you. But my folks would rather keep me at home to do the housework.'

"'Come, and I'll give you some candy I got when I was a godmother.'

"'Have you been a godmother? Oh! what a lucky girl you are! you have everything!'

"It is very hard to resist the invitation of a friend who offers us candy. The fillette forgets her housework, her stew, her canary, and even her breakfast, as she chats with her old schoolmate, who has been a godmother and is engaged.

"When at last she goes home, just as she is entering the house, she is saluted, and sometimes accosted, by a young man of most respectable aspect, whom she invariably meets when she goes out. I leave you to judge at what hour the housework will be done and the soup skimmed.

"This young man is not a lover as yet, but he closely resembles a man in love, and if ill fortune sometimes befalls the fillette, who is at fault? Is she the one to be blamed? should we not charge it rather to the parents, who so shamefully neglect those who have neither strength, nor sense, nor experience, to resist the seductions of the world?

"Paris is swarming with these fillettes, messieurs; some remain virtuous, although they live among dangers; as they have no fortune, they do not always find husbands, but pass from the fillette stage to that of an old maid, without becoming better housekeepers by the change.

"As for the *grisettes*, that's another story. The grisette loves pleasure; she wants it, she must have it. She has at least one lover; when she has only one, she is a most exemplary grisette. However, they do not pretend to be any better than they are; they make no parade of false virtue; they are neither prudish nor shy; they cultivate students, actors, artists, the theatre, balls,—out of doors or indoors,—promenades, dance halls, restaurants; and they do not recoil at the thought of a private dining-room.

"The grisette is a gourmand, and is almost always hungry; she is wild over truffles, but is perfectly content to stuff herself with potatoes; she adores meringues, but regales herself daily with biscuit and tarts; she would climb a greased pole for a glass of champagne, but does not refuse a mug of cider.

"You know as well as I, messieurs, that when you have treated a grisette to a dainty dinner, you must not conclude that her appetite is satisfied. On leaving the table, if you are in the country, the grisette will suggest shooting for macaroons, and will consume several dozen; then she will ask for a drink of milk, and a piece of rye bread to soak in it; then she will want some cherries, then beer and gingerbread. In Paris, you will have to supply her with barley sugar, syrups, punch, and Italian cheese.

"Let us do the grisette of Paris justice; she is active, frisky, alluring, provoking; she is not always pretty, but she has a certain—I don't know what to call it—a sort of *chic*, which always finds followers. She handles the

simplest materials in such a way as to make herself a pretty little costume; she often wears an apron, and a cap almost always; she rarely puts anything else on her head, and she is very wise; for her face, which is captivating in a cap, loses much of its charm under a bonnet, unless it be a *bibi*, the front of which never extends beyond the end of her nose.

"The grisette is a milliner, or laundress, or dressmaker, or embroiderer, or burnisher, or stringer of pearls, or something else—but she has a trade. To be sure, she seldom works at it. Suggest a trip into the country, a donkey ride, a bachelor breakfast, a dinner at La Chaumière, a ticket to the play, and the shop or workroom or desk may go to the deuce.

"So long as we can afford her amusement, she will think of nothing else; but when her lover hasn't a sou, she will return to her work as cheerily as if she were going to dine at Passoir's, or to do a little cancan at the Château-Rouge; for, messieurs, you may be sure of one thing—the grisette is a philosopher, she takes things as they come, money for what it is worth, and men for what they do for her. She loves passionately for a fortnight; she believes then that it will last all her life, and proposes to her lover that they go to live on a desert island, like Crusoe, and eat raw vegetables and shellfish. As she is very fond of radishes and oysters, she thinks that she will be able to accustom herself to that diet; but in a moment she forgets all about that scheme, and cries:

"'Ah! how I would like some roast veal, and some lettuce salad garnished with hard-boiled eggs! Take me to Asnières, Dodolphe, and we'll dine out of doors; and I'll pluck some daisies and pull off the petals and find

out your real sentiments, for the daisies never lie. If it stops at *passionately*, I'll kiss you on the left eye; if it tells me that you don't love me at all, I'll stick pins into your legs. What better proofs of love do you want?'

"But Dodolphe finds himself sometimes on his uppers.

"'You say you haven't got any money?' cries the grisette; 'bah! what a nuisance it is that one always has to have money to live on and enjoy one's self! Wait a minute; I've got a merino dress and a winter shawl; it's summer now, so I don't need 'em. They'll be better off at *my aunt's* than they are in my room, for there are moths there; they'll be better taken care of, and with what I can get on 'em we'll go and have some sport.'

"The grisette carries out her plan: she puts her clothes in pawn, without regret or melancholy. If she had money, she would give it to her lover. As she often spends all that he has, it seems natural to her to spend with him all that she has: she is neither stingy, saving, nor selfish.

"A grisette's lodging is a curious place; but she hasn't always a lodging to herself; very often she simply perches here and there. She will stay a week with her lover, three weeks with a friend of her own sex, and the rest of the time with her fruiterer or her concierge. When, by any chance, she does possess a domicile and furniture of her own, the grisette's bosom swells with pride, even when the furniture in question consists of nothing more than a cot, a mirror, and one broken chair. She takes delight in saying: 'I shall stay *at home* this evening,' or: 'I don't expect to leave *home* to-morrow. I have an idea of doing *my room* over in color; it's all the style now, especially yellow; when it's well rubbed, it makes more effect than furniture.'

"It is she who writes on her door, with a piece of Spanish chalk, when she goes out: *I am at my nabor's, down one flite.*

"But the grisette is not obliged to know the rules of orthography; and if she spoke the purest French, her conversation would probably seem less amusing; there are so many people who attract by their bad qualities.

"Sometimes the grisette ventures to give an evening party. When she is in the mood, she will invite as many as seven people. On such occasions, the bed does duty as a divan, the blinds as benches, the cooking stove as a table, and the lamp from the staircase is placed on the mantel to take the place of a chandelier. Punch is brewed in a soup tureen, and tea in a saucepan; they drink from egg cups, there is one spoon for three persons, and the hostess's shawl serves as a table cloth and as a napkin for all the company; all of which does not prevent the guests from laughing and enjoying themselves; for the most genuine enjoyment is not that which costs the most. This is not a new maxim, but it is very consoling to those who are not favored by fortune."

As he said this, Dumouton glanced down at himself, with a profound sigh. But encouraged, I doubt not, by a glimpse of the ends of his cravat, by that profusion of linen, to which he was not accustomed, he speedily resumed his smiling expression and continued his discourse.

"I come now, messieurs, to the last division of my trilogy, the *lorettes*, who are grisettes of the front rank—the *tip-toppers!* By that I mean that they are sought by the fashionable lions, the dandies, the Jockey Club—in a word, by those gentry who have a liking for spending money freely with women, and who have the means to do it.

"The lorettes live in the Chaussée d'Antin, the Nouvelle-Athènes, the Champs-Élysées, the quarter of *sport*, of the *turf*, or, if you prefer, of the horse traders. They are found, too, in quite large numbers, in the new streets. When a fine house is completed—that is to say, when the stairs are in place, so that the different floors are accessible, the proprietor lets apartments to lorettes, *to dry the walls*, as they say. They hire dainty suites, freshly decorated; everyone knows that they won't pay their rent, but the rooms are let to them because they draw people to the house; they attract other tenants; not honest bourgeois—nay, nay!—but fashionable young men, rich old bachelors, and sometimes men with stylish carriages.

"By the way, the lorette is exceedingly frank in this respect. One of them was inspecting a beautiful suite on Rue Mazagran, when the concierge, who probably did not know whom he was dealing with, was simple enough to tell her the price, repeating several times that she could not have it for less than fifteen hundred francs. Irritated by his persistence, the lorette stared at him as if he were a monstrosity, exclaiming:

"'Look you, monsieur, who do you think you're talking to? What difference does it make to me what the rent is, when I never pay?'

"The lorette dresses stylishly and coquettishly; she leaves a trail of perfume behind her. She has magnificent bouquets, and her gloves are the object of much solicitude. At a distance, one might take her for a lady of rank and fashion; but to hear her speak is fatal, and the illusion vanishes at once, her language being infinitely less pure than the polish on her boots.

"The lorette seeks to eclipse the grisette, whom she pretends to look down upon, but to whom she is vastly

inferior, none the less. She has no lover, she has keepers. And yet she is not a kept woman, for such a one sometimes remains a long while with the same *monsieur*, whereas the lorette is constantly changing.

"The grisette likes young men; the lorette prefers men of mature years.

"The Hippodrome and the Cirque des Champs-Élysées are the resorts which the lorettes particularly affect. In the afternoon, they go thither to admire the bold horsemen jumping fences, or the women driving chariots in the ring. The Hippodrome audience being, as a rule, frivolous, dandified, and fashionable,—especially on weekdays,—these ladies are almost certain to make their expenses.

"In the evening, they go to admire Baucher; they jump up and down in ecstasy on their benches when Auriol makes some new hair-raising plunge. The lorette is never tired of repeating to her *spouse*—for so she calls her friend of the moment—that she knows nothing more beautiful than a horse.

"The lorette gives evening parties, where there are always many men and very few women. All games are played there, from lotto to lansquenet. These ladies are passionately fond of gambling; but when they take their places beside a green cloth, they tell you frankly that they propose to win; it is for you to take your measures accordingly. One day, at a game of lansquenet, the banker being a pretty lorette, someone discovered that she was cheating, and she was charged with it; far from denying the charge, she began to laugh, and retorted: 'Mon Dieu! what does it matter whether I take your money this way or some other way?'

"The lorette knows nothing but money; don't continue to show yourself in her presence when your purse

is empty, for her love will surely have followed your cash. She is not the woman to pawn her clothes in order to have a jollification with you.

"The lorette has handsome furniture, but she doesn't pay for it, any more than she pays her rent. If you take her to dine at a restaurant, she will begin by playing the prude. She will declare that she isn't hungry; she doesn't like this or that; one thing makes her sick, another is abhorrent to her. But in the end she gets tipsy and has indigestion.

"The proper method, in my opinion at least, is to take a lorette for a day, a grisette for a month, and a fillette for life, when you meet one who has found time during the day to dress herself and arrange her hair, to do her housework, eat her breakfast, watch her soup kettle, and tie her shoestrings; for then you will have discovered a phœnix, or the eighth wonder of the world.

"To sum up, the fillette craves sentiment, the grisette pleasure, the lorette money.

"I venture to hope, messieurs, that you will accept this superficial study of women instead of a *bonne fortune;* especially as it is a very long while since fortune has been kind [*bonne*] to me; and, unluckily, I have had no leisure to think of love making, so that I could tell you nothing worthy of a hearing after all that I have had the pleasure of listening to."

VI

MONSIEUR FOUVENARD'S *BONNE FORTUNE*.—THE GINGERBREAD WOMAN

Everybody had listened with pleasure to Monsieur Dumouton's study of womankind. Only Monsieur Faisandé, without a word, left his seat and disappeared while the author was talking. The disappearance of the Treasury clerk did not grieve us overmuch, nor did it interfere with our drinking and laughing and saying whatever came into our heads. But as Balloquet seemed to possess some private information concerning that modest personage, I determined to question him on the subject; for I was anxious to know whether I was mistaken in my conjectures, and whether I owed Monsieur Faisandé an apology for the evil thoughts of him that had come to my mind.

Fouvenard was the only one of the party who had not yet narrated his little adventure. Dupréval, our host, turned to that gentleman, whose features, the nose alone excepted, were buried beneath the wilderness of beard, moustache, whiskers, and eyebrows, which invaded his face and threatened to transform it into a wig.

Monsieur Fouvenard passed his hand across his forehead and ran it through his mane, as he said:

"I have been looking over my catalogue, but I haven't succeeded in disentangling anything as yet. And so, messieurs, I propose to tell you the story of my last love affair; it is still quite fresh. It is not my last *bonne*

fortune, but it is the most entertaining, I think, of the later ones; you may judge for yourselves.

"Two or three months ago, having nothing to do one Sunday, and being unable to endure the day in Paris, which, as you all know, messieurs, is insufferable on Sunday, especially when it's fine; for then the streets and boulevards are overrun by a crowd of people with outlandish faces, walking arm in arm, four or five and sometimes six in a row, and making it as tiresome to walk as it is difficult—in a word, I jumped aboard a train in the first railway station I came to, without so much as inquiring where it would take me. I believe I would have travelled a long distance—to Belgium, perhaps—I was so disgusted with Paris that Sunday! But the train I took did not go so far; my journey was very brief, and I soon found myself in the pretty village of Sceaux. When I say *village*, I am wrong, for Sceaux is a small town; but the instant that I see trees and fields and green grass, I cannot believe that I am near a town.

"I left my car, or my diligence,—I am not sure which I was in,—and walked about at random. The Bal de Sceaux, once so brilliant and crowded, has lost much of its popularity. Everything has its day, messieurs! open-air balls as well as great empires, and beauty! The Vendanges de Bourgogne had ceased to exist. That lively restaurant, where so many banquets and ultra *chicard* balls used to be given, and where the women danced in *tableau vivant* costume,—a place that owed its vogue originally to its excellent sheep's trotters,—has closed its doors; let us hope that it will reopen them. And even the Méridien!—the Méridien! I will not insult you by asking you if you ever went there! Who is the man, provided he is ever so little a lady's man, who has not

been to the Méridien, where the private rooms were so well arranged for congenial parties? Well, messieurs, that charming little restaurant, which, as you know, was close by here, has also closed its doors. In fact, everything has been demolished, even the Cadran Bleu. That once famous resort has vanished from Boulevard du Temple. Upon my word, it is really heartrending! Where shall we go now to dine, when we have a pretty woman to entertain? I am grieved to say it, messieurs, but suitable places are becoming very rare in Paris; one must needs go *extra muros* to find silence, secrecy, and all the comforts which add to the charm of a tête-à-tête; and one has not always the leisure to go out of Paris.

"Excuse me for indulging in these reflections—I return to my subject. I had been strolling about Sceaux for some time, and I noticed that those peasant girls who were dressed coquettishly and arrayed in all their finery, those, in short, who seemed disposed to dance and enjoy themselves generally, were leaving the town and going in the direction of Fontenay-aux-Roses.

"I at once made inquiries of a worthy woman who sold gingerbread, and who seemed to view with an expression of alarm the general desertion of the population. By the purchase of a huge gingerbread man for four sous, for which I paid cash, and by praising her cookery, I gained the huckster's good will.

"'Where are all these girls going in their Sunday clothes?' I inquired, bravely attacking my gingerbread man's foot.

"'Mon Dieu! monsieur, as if there was any need of asking! *Pardine!* they're going to Fontenay, on the pretext that there's a fête there to-day; and there'll be a little fair, and a man to tumble and play tricks, and make

a fool of himself. As if it wasn't a hundred times nicer here! As if our ball wasn't a hundred times finer! But they all have the devil in 'em, and they lead each other on. There's no way to stop 'em. So you're my first customer to-day; I ain't sold two sous' worth all day long.'

"'Well, why don't you do as everybody else does? What is there to hinder you from moving your stall and your gingerbread to Fontenay-aux-Roses?'

"'Oh! monsieur, we folks don't go changing about like that. People have been used to seeing me here, on this same spot, for thirty years; and if they should miss me, especially on a Sunday, they'd say: "Why, where in the world's old Mère Giroux? She must be sick, or dead."—And it would hurt my trade if folks thought that; because, you see, monsieur, I have regular customers, although you might not think so. They're folks from Paris, who always buy stuff of me for their young ones, when they come to Sceaux. And it don't pay to put our customers out; we can't afford to lose regular ones when we have any, just to make a few more sous one day; and I have some, as I tell you.'

"I was about to leave Mère Giroux, who was so proud of having regular customers, when I saw three girls coming along, arm in arm, hopping rather than walking. Two of them had the costume and general aspect of the peasant girls of the neighborhood; they were dressed very coquettishly, in white gowns, silk aprons, little caps trimmed with lace and bows of ribbon, and even gloves, messieurs; yes, it's not a rare thing nowadays, in the outskirts of Paris, on a holiday, to see gloved peasant girls. They don't use musk as yet, thank God! but with time and railroads, I feel sure that the women of nature

will soon perfume themselves like cultivated women; and, to tell the truth, it will be an agreeable change, for they don't smell very sweet as a rule. I ask Nature's pardon, but it's the truth.

"My two peasants, then, had paid much attention to their costume; but, for all that, under their fine clothes they were genuine rustics. One could see that by their arms and feet, by their manners, by their loud laughter, and by the red blotches with which their faces were covered. Moreover, those same faces, while they were not ugly, were not specially attractive, except for their extreme freshness. So that my eyes did not rest long on those young women; but it was not so with the third member of their party, although her dress was almost a counterpart of her companions'.

"You see, it isn't the cap that makes a girl pretty, but the way she puts it on and wears it; and so it is with the rest of her attire. The young person who caught my eye was some eighteen years of age; she was above middle height, slender, graceful, and willowy; for one can see that, at a glance, in the slightest motion of the body. There was nothing extraordinary about her features, but the face as a whole attracted one instantly. She was a blonde, with blue eyes and red lips; when she laughed, her mouth assumed a delicious expression, in which innocence and mischief were blended; her teeth were well arranged, and, while they could not be described as 'pearls set in rose leaves,' as it is customary to describe a pretty woman's mouth, they were beyond reproach; her hair, which was slightly tinged with gold, was arranged in little curls, in the style called, I believe, *à la neige*. In that respect, there was a notable difference between her and her two companions, whose hair was

glued to their temples in little heartbreakers. What more can I say? There was an indefinable something about that girl which indicated that she had not always lived in the fields. There was a savor of Paris about her; for a woman who never leaves her village does not acquire the manners, the bearing, the ease, which contrast so sharply with the awkward accomplishments of the country.

"My pretty blonde wore a striped lilac and white dress. She also wore a silk apron; but hers was of a grayish purple which harmonized perfectly with her gown. Her cap was very simple, but in the best taste, and perched so daintily on the top of her head that it seemed hardly to touch it. Her shoes were black, and the feet within them were small, narrow, and gracefully arched; the leg was small, but not thin, and gave promise of excellent outlines. You will agree, messieurs, that all this was well adapted to attract my glances.

"The three girls were passing Mère Giroux, when she detained them.

"'Well, where are you girls going, I'd like to know,' she cried, 'that you're all rigged up and sail by, all three of you, proud as ortolans, without so much as bidding me good-day?'

"They stopped at that, and bade the dealer in gingerbread good-morning.

"'Bonjour, Mère Giroux!'

"'It's because we're in a hurry; we're going to Fontenay-aux-Roses.'

"'We're going to dance.'

"'We're going to see the shows, and the animals, and the monkeys.'

"'Mon Dieu! you can see all that here! It ain't worth while to go out of your way to see monkeys!'

"'Nonsense! it's going to be a lovely fête at Fontenay. You can see for yourself that everybody's going there.'

"'Everybody's just stupid enough; when one makes a spitball, the rest would rather be hung than not do as much.'

"'Oh! Mère Giroux! how spiteful you are!'

"'I say, you Dargenettes, do your parents let you go running about the country like this, without them?'

"'*Pardi!* nobody'll kidnap us. Besides, Mignonne's with us.'

"'Bless my soul! Mignonne's a fine dragon, ain't she? Why, she's younger'n you! and she rolls her eye the minute anyone looks at her, as if it gave her cramp in the stomach.'

"Mignonne was evidently the pretty blonde in the centre, for she answered at once with a saucy little smile, and a glance at me out of the corner of her eye; for during this conversation I was still standing near the gingerbread stall, and still munching my four-sous' purchase.

"'If I am young, Mère Giroux, that doesn't prevent my keeping an eye on these girls; for I've been in Paris, and I'm not to be caught.'

"'You, Mignonne! nonsense! You'll be caught sooner than the others, I'll bet! You're too sugary; you'll melt!'

"'Anyway,' cried the other two, 'do you suppose we're afraid of men? Why, there's nothing frightful about 'em!'

"'If they'd grow, I'd plant a field of them.'

"Whereupon they roared with laughter; but pretty Mignonne took no part in it; she pulled her companions away, crying:

"'Au revoir, Mère Giroux! Au revoir!'

"'What! ain't you going to buy as much as a stick of barley sugar, to suck on the way?'

"'By and by, when we come back; to cool us off.'

"When the girls had gone, the huckster complained more loudly than ever about the nuisance of the fêtes in the neighboring villages. For my part, I was determined to have another look at the blonde whom they called Mignonne, but I desired, first of all, to obtain some information concerning her. I began by buying a huge square of gingerbread, larded with almonds, while loudly praising what I had already eaten. Mère Giroux, flattered to the melting point, gazed at me with an expression that seemed to say:

"'Ah! if all the young men who come to Sceaux only liked gingerbread as much as this gentleman does!'

"'Mère Giroux,' I said, carefully bestowing my new purchase in my pocket, 'you seem to know those young women who went by just now?'

"'*Pardi!* I know everybody in the neighborhood, I do!'

"'Are they farmers' daughters?'

"'Yes, the two dark ones are, the Dargenettes. They're good enough girls, for all their talk about men; if anybody should go too far with 'em, they'd do good work with their feet and hands and nails, I'll warrant. They like to fool, but they're virtuous! And then, their father wouldn't stand any fooling. Old Dargenette's a gardener, and he ain't very pleasant every day. He fondled his wife with his rake when she didn't walk straight; and I guess he'd do the same to his daughters, if they should go astray. Country folk, monsieur, talk a little free sometimes, but you mustn't judge 'em by that.'

"'And that other girl with them, whom you called Mignonne? She carries herself as if she had lived in Paris.'

"'Yes, monsieur; so she has. Mignonne's the daughter of honest laboring people of this town; but she lost her

father and mother when she was very young. Then she caught the fancy of a lady in Paris, and she took her away and said she'd give her a good education. Mignonne Landernoy had nobody left but an old aunt, who wa'n't none too rich. So she let her niece go; the child was twelve years old then. She stayed in Paris three years. I don't know just what she learned there—to read and write and do embroidery, and sew on canvas—in short, a lot of useless things that make a country girl fit for nothing. So, when she came back to her aunt, she couldn't be made to work in the fields again. *Ouiche!* she said it made her back ache!'

"'But why did she come back? Why did she leave the lady who took her to Paris?'

"'Because the lady died, and then, you see, her heirs didn't choose to keep the little girl from Sceaux. They began by turning her out of doors, and Mignonne was very happy to come back to her old aunt.'

"'Has she been to Paris again since?'

"'No; but I don't think it's for lack of wanting to. You can imagine that she's kept something of the manners she learned from living with city folks: a way of acting, and little tricks of speech—— Oh! she's no peasant now. Why, mamzelle sets the fashions here! When the other girls want to make themselves a cap, or an apron, or a neckerchief, they say: "I'll go and ask Mignonne if this will look well on me, and how to wear it."—And it's Mignonne here, and Mignonne there! Why, you'd think she was an oracle, nothing more or less! When Mignonne says: "You mustn't wear that," or: "You mustn't walk on your toes like that," or: "You mustn't dance on that leg," you needn't be afraid they'll do it. And then, as Mamzelle Mignonne can read novels,

she knows lots of stories and adventures, you see. So, when she's talking, the peasant girls prick up their ears, like my donkey does when he feels frisky. Why, those Dargenettes are as proud as peacocks because Mignonne agreed to go to Fontenay-aux-Roses with them!'

"'But what does the girl do here, as she doesn't work in the fields?'

"'*Dame!* she makes over dresses, and makes caps for the other girls; she's the town milliner, but her poor aunt has only just enough for the two of 'em. And what I can't forgive the girl for is refusing Claude Flaquart, a good match for her, who was willing to marry her, for all she didn't have a sou. Claude Flaquart was mad over her. You see, she's a pretty little thing—and then, her affected ways are sure to turn a fool's head.'

"'You say she refused him?'

"'Yes, monsieur! Think of refusing a man who owns a field and a vineyard, three cows, two calves, rabbits, and geese! What in God's name does she want, anyway? a lord? a potentate?'

"'What reason did she give for refusing such a fine match?'

"'Reasons! a lot she cared for reasons! She didn't like him; that's all the reason she gave! She said he was a lout, and that he was lame. As if a man with cows and calves could walk crooked!'

"'Didn't her aunt scold her?'

"'Her aunt's too good-natured—too big a fool, I should say. Claude Flaquart had his revenge: he married another girl, a head taller than Mignonne, and he did well. That's what comes o' sending girls to Paris, when they haven't got any money to set themselves up in business there. Mignonne will make a fool of herself

with some fine young buck from Paris—I'd stake my head on it! and by and by she'll be sighing for Claude Flaquart's cottage.'

"'I am delighted to have bought some of your gingerbread, Mère Giroux; it's very fine. When I come to Sceaux again, you will certainly see me.'

"'You're very good, monsieur; so now you're one of my customers; that adds to my stock. You'd ought to buy some of this with citron, monsieur; you'd think you was eating oranges.'

"'I'll save that for the next time.'

"I knew enough. I bade her good-morning, and started for Fontenay-aux-Roses, which is only a quarter of a league from Sceaux."

VII

MADEMOISELLE MIGNONNE

Monsieur Fouvenard paused to take breath, and drank a glass of champagne; while we waited for him to continue his narrative, which, I confess, interested me deeply. For some unknown reason, I trembled to think of that pretty little Mignonne yielding to the seductions of the narrator, who, in truth, did not seem to me particularly seductive. But I am not a woman, and it is possible that that Capuchin beard possessed a fascination which I cannot understand.

"I soon reached Fontenay," he continued; "I had only to follow the crowd of people headed for the fête. Once there, I said to myself: 'I shall be very unlucky if I don't find Mignonne.'

"I had been strolling about for some time in front of the improvised stalls on a sort of square, when I discovered my three damsels, still arm in arm, halting in front of all the curiosities, games, and open-air shows, and giving full vent to the natural merriment of their age, intensified by Mignonne's satirical comments.

"Most of the young men bowed to them and made some jocose remark, generally vulgar and indecent, as the custom is among the country folk, whose innocence has always seemed to me largely apocryphal. The two Dargenettes replied in the same tone; but when Mignonne said anything, the young men did not retort; they sneaked away shamefaced, and I heard them more than once say to one another:

"'Oh! when Mamzelle Mignonne puts her oar in, I ain't smart enough to answer her back; she's too sharp, she is! Anyone can see that she's lived in Paris.'

"I approached the three friends and stopped at the stalls and shows at which they stopped. Mignonne noticed me, and I fancied that she blushed. One of the Dargenettes looked at me and said:

"'Look! there's that fellow that was eating Mère Giroux's gingerbread. It looks funny for a Paris gentleman, with a beard, to eat gingerbread like that.'

"I saw Mignonne nudge the speaker. Probably she told her to keep quiet, for I heard nothing more.

"I tried to exchange a word or two with them, but they pretended not to hear me, and made no reply. However, I saw that they whispered together, and from time to time looked covertly to see if I was still there. At last they came to a halt where the dancing was in progress. I was waiting for that. Dancing is not exactly my favorite pastime; but when it's a question of seducing

somebody's daughter, then I become a fearless dancer. As for young women, almost all of them love dancing; indeed, there are some in whom the taste amounts to a passion; but if they had to dance without men, you may be sure that their love for dancing would soon vanish. Whence I conclude that the actual pleasure of capering is a secondary matter. But dancing gives an opportunity to show one's grace and lightness of foot, to play the flirt, to listen to soft speeches, often to passionate avowals, accompanied by a pressure of the hand, before the nose of a jealous spectator, who sees nothing, because it's a part of the figure!—Is it surprising, then, that almost all women have an inborn passion for the dance?

"I made haste to engage Mademoiselle Mignonne for a contra-dance; for the polka has not yet descended upon village fêtes. She accepted my invitation with a well-satisfied air. I at once took her hand, and, leaving her friends, led her away to our places. I say again that nothing better for lovers, *in esse* or *in futuro*, has ever been invented. I very soon entered into conversation with my partner. I was careful not to go too fast, and not to begin, like an idiot, by telling her that I adored her; she would have laughed in my face. But I did not conceal my amazement at her manner, her bearing, her language; I told her that it could not be that she was born in a village. Thereupon she told me what I already knew; but I pretended that I heard it for the first time. I did not squeeze her hand, but I manifested the deepest interest in her, and engaged her for the next contra-dance. At first, she made some objections; but I persisted, and she accepted. I saw plainly enough that it flattered her to dance with a gentleman from the city.

"When we joined her companions, who had also been dancing, they were drenched with perspiration and their cheeks were purple; but their partners had left them without offering them any refreshment. I made haste to call a waiter who was selling beer or wine, the only refreshments to be found at open-air fêtes.—Oh, yes! there are also vendors of cocoa.—The beer being brought, the two Dargenettes did not wait to be asked twice, and Mignonne saw that it would be useless to stand on ceremony.

"Thus I found myself one of their party. But I behaved with a restraint and reserve which would have edified Monsieur Faisandé. During the second contradance, Mademoiselle Mignonne talked even more freely; and I saw that, while she had brought back from Paris the pretty manners and the more refined language which gave her such a great advantage over the village girls, she had retained the candor and artlessness which we do not find in city maidens, even in those who have been reared most strictly. Mignonne was a strange mixture of innocence and knowledge, of frankness and coquetry, of simplicity and passion. Her stay in Paris, the people she had seen there, the reading with which she had tired her memory, had given her a feeling of distaste for the country, although her mind and her heart still retained all the primitive freshness of a virgin nature.—Agree, messieurs, that that child was a charming conquest to contemplate."

"Faith! there was no great merit in the conquest!" cried Balloquet. "The girl wouldn't have a peasant, so she was sure to fall into the first snare laid for her by a man from the city; and then, your beard must have helped you considerably in triumphing over Mademoiselle Mignonne."

"Why so?"

"Because it partly hides your face."

Fouvenard shrugged his shoulders, threw a bread ball at Balloquet, and resumed his narrative.

"After the second contra-dance, Mignonne said that she wanted to walk about. I asked leave to accompany them, and I had been so polite that they could not refuse me. Indeed, I think that they were not anxious to do so; the Dargenettes, because they liked to be treated; and Mignonne, because she was flattered to have a young Parisian for her escort.

"She declined to take my arm; but I walked beside her, as she was no longer between her friends. I paid for their admission to all the shows under canvas, of the sort that are always found at an out-of-doors fête. Mignonne tried to refuse at first, but the two peasants hurried into the strolling theatre, and the pretty blonde had to follow them in order not to be left alone with me.

"Toward the end of the evening, we were like old acquaintances. I had treated them to everything obtainable, and I had even danced with Mignonne's friends.

"We left the fête together. It was dark, and they accepted my arm. I had Mignonne on one side, and one of the peasants on the other; the second had her sister's arm, so that we walked four abreast. Country people delight in that, and it reminded me unpleasantly of Sunday strollers in Paris. I would have preferred to walk alone with Mignonne, but it was impossible.

"It seemed to me a very short walk, notwithstanding the fact that the Dargenettes sang all the way, and sang horribly false, murdering every air they tried. But Mignonne did not sing, and I began to press affectionately the arm that lay in mine.

"Chance willed that we reached the peasants' house before Mignonne's. They said good-night, and kissed one another laughingly. I heard them whispering, and could make out that I was the subject. The Dargenettes said: 'You have made a conquest of the bearded man! Look out he don't kidnap you!' and other witticisms of the same sort.

VIII

AN EXPEDIENT

"At last I was alone with that pretty girl. I need not tell you, messieurs, that I became loving, eloquent, urgent. Mademoiselle Mignonne laughed at everything I said; but it pleased her. As a general rule, when that sort of thing doesn't please a woman, she doesn't listen to the man who tries it on. As soon as we are listened to, we can be sure of triumphing. I requested an assignation. She refused; but I declared that I would come to Sceaux every day; to which she replied that she could not prevent my meeting her.

"To make a long story short, messieurs, I met Mignonne the next day, and the next, and every day that week. I spent a good deal in railroad fares; but one must be willing to sow if he would reap.

"After ten or twelve days, I had completely turned the girl's head, and I persuaded her to go with me to Paris, where I promised her a brilliant existence, pleasure by the wholesale, and, above all, a never-ending love. Mademoiselle Mignonne set great store by that, I assure you.

She was a romantic maiden. But it costs us men nothing to promise, you know! I am not sure, indeed, that I didn't mention marriage; but I think not.

"It all resulted in a little fifth-floor room, under the eaves, in a house on Rue de Ménilmontant. I furnished it with whatever was necessary, nothing more, and covered the walls with paper at twelve sous the roll. I must confess that my love was not exacting; she desired neither a palace, nor a cashmere shawl, nor a carriage; my presence —that was all that was necessary to satisfy her.

"That state of affairs lasted for several months. At the end of that time, I would have been very glad to be rid of my conquest; I had had enough of her. If she had been sensible, I would have said to her, frankly:

"'My dear girl, I did love you, but I don't love you any more. It was sure to come, sooner or later; liaisons like ours never last very long; it's all the same, whether we make an end of it now, or six months hence. Make another acquaintance, or return to Sceaux, as you please; for my part, I have the honor to bid you good-day.'

"But, as I said, I had to do with a young woman who had never thoroughly understood Paris and the Parisians, but who had seen them through a miraculous prism. Moreover, she proved to have a strength of character which astonished me. She had honestly believed that I would never leave her. You will say, perhaps, that it was in my power to cease going to see her; but, unluckily, at the beginning of our liaison, I had been idiotic enough to take her to my lodgings, and to show her the shop in which I am a partner; so if I had let a day or two pass without seeing her, what would have happened? Why, she would have come after me, either at my lodgings or at my shop; and that would have led to a very

annoying scene, especially as my partner is almost as ridiculous as Monsieur Faisandé, and believes me to be a perfect Cato.

"So there was nothing for me to do but break with my girl in such a way as effectually to take away the desire to hunt me up in my own quarters. A confidential disclosure which she made to me intensified my longing to put an end to the connection: she informed me that she bore a pledge of our love. Fancy me with a woman and child on my hands!—Damnation, messieurs! put yourselves in my place."

Monsieur Fouvenard paused to look at us all. But no one answered; and he continued, evidently surprised by the profound silence and the almost stern expression of his hearers:

"So I looked about for an opportunity to break with her; what I needed was a tempestuous, violent scene, for a German quarrel would not have sufficed to part us.—I had then and still have a friend, a fellow who is very enterprising with the fair sex, and almost as fascinating as myself. That is saying a good deal, perhaps, but it's true. You must have heard of him: his name is Rambertin, and he is a commercial traveller who has left Ariadnes in all the places he ever visited. I had met him several times, in the early days of my liaison with Mignonne, when I took my love to Mabille or the Château-Rouge. He had found the young lady of Sceaux much to his taste. One day, meeting me when I was alone and rather depressed, he asked me what I had done with my *blondinette*.

"'Parbleu!' said I; 'I would to God I had nothing more to do with her! If you could rid me of her, you would do me a very great favor.'

"'Are you speaking seriously?' cried Rambertin.

"'Most seriously.'

"'Then it's a bargain.'

"'But you don't know that Mignonne adores me; what you must do is to arrange matters so that I can break with her.'

"Rambertin began to laugh and rub his hands.

"'It seems to me,' he said, 'that I've a longer head than you; for when it's a matter of breaking off a liaison, I can always think of ten ways to do it. Of course, you go to see your fair whenever you choose; and you probably have a key to her room, so that you can go in when she's in bed?'

"'That is true.'

"'Give me your key. To-morrow I will have one like it, and the thing will go of itself.'

"The next day, Rambertin had a key like the one I had loaned him, which he returned to me, saying:

"'I know where the lady lives. It's a house where there's a concierge with five cats; but I am about your size, I'll cover my face with my cloak, and this very night I'll sleep in Mignonne's room. I fancy that she sleeps without a light. I will act so cautiously that she will not suspect that another man is occupying your place. You must come there early to-morrow morning; you have your key, so you can come in and surprise me reposing beside your charmer. I should say that you would have the right to lose your head then, call her a faithless hussy, and drop her.'

"I considered it a magnificent plan, and it was put in execution. Rambertin is audacious beyond description. Everything succeeded as we hoped. I went to Mignonne's room very early the next morning. She was still asleep

beside my substitute, suspecting nothing. And Rambertin too pretended to be asleep. But I was no sooner in the room than I made a great outcry. I called Mignonne faithless, perjured—— Oh! messieurs, if you could have seen the girl's amazement and horror! I assure you, it was an intensely dramatic picture. She declared that she was not guilty, that she was the victim of a detestable piece of treachery. She tried to throw herself at my feet, to force me to listen to her. But as I was not at all anxious that she should justify herself, I left the room, shouting that all was over between us.

"I confess that I was afraid that Mignonne would try to see me again, that she would waylay me somewhere, to try again to convince me of her innocence; but several days passed, and I heard nothing of her. At last, I met Rambertin.

"'Well,' I said, 'the *blondinette* seems to have been consoled very quickly; you couldn't have had much difficulty in making her listen to reason.'

"'You're devilishly mistaken,' he replied; 'on the contrary, your Mignonne is a young woman who refuses to be tamed. At first, being persuaded that you believed her guilty, she was determined to go after you, to dog your steps and compel you to listen to her. Faith! my dear fellow, when I saw how it was, I just simply confessed our little scheme to bring about a rupture between you two. The effect of that confession was most extraordinary. At first, the girl refused to believe me, but I proved to her that I was telling the truth: I had a little note from you, telling me at what café I could find you, to return the key of Mignonne's room. I showed her that note, and she could have no further doubt. She said just this: "The infamous villain!" Not another word about

going after you. "Now," says I to myself, "she's at odds with him for good and all; I must try to obtain my pardon." And I tried to make her understand that I had loved her for a long while, and that only the intensity of my passion could have induced me to second you in that affair. But Mademoiselle Mignonne, without deigning to reply to my entreaties, pointed to the door and said:

"'"Leave this room, monsieur, and never let me see your face again, or I will go to the magistrate and tell him of your shameful conduct."

"'I tried in vain to make her understand that the night we had passed together gave me some rights over her; the fair Mignonne was immovable. I tried to steal a kiss; she shrieked so loud that the neighbors came to their windows. And so, faith! I went away; but let her do what she will, I'll bide my time, I'll seize the first favorable opportunity, and we won't stop where we are!'

"Such, messieurs, was Rambertin's story, and that is how I broke off my liaison with the damsel of Sceaux. Don't you think the method I resorted to was very ingenious? I'll wager that you'll bear it in mind, in order to make use of it on occasion!"

Monsieur Fouvenard looked at us, one after another, as if he expected compliments and congratulations; but, on the contrary, nobody spoke, and almost every face had assumed a serious expression. Indeed, there were some faces on which he seemed to detect something more than mere seriousness; for, I am happy to say, his narrative found no sympathy among us.

As for myself, I had always felt a sort of repulsion for that young man, a repulsion of the sort that one cannot describe, but that one often feels for a certain person. At that moment, I was gratified to think that I had always

disliked a man capable of such dastardly, vile behavior as he boasted of in connection with that poor girl from Sceaux. The portrait he had drawn of Mignonne interested and touched me; and it seemed to me that I should like to know her, and to avenge her for the infamous way in which she had been victimized.

Dupréval, who had observed the unpleasant impression produced by the bearded man's tale, and who, presumably, was not proud of having that individual for his guest, was the first to speak.

"It has taken you a long while, Fouvenard," he said, in an almost harsh tone, "to compose the anecdote you have just told us; but, frankly, you would have done as well to keep silent instead of regaling us with that tale of seduction, the dénouement of which may be worthy of the Regency, but is not at all suited to our code of morals; for nowadays, when a man desires to leave a mistress, it is no longer necessary to degrade her, to throw her into his friend's arms. Those are old-fashioned methods, which you have read about in some old memoirs of Cardinal Dubois's time; but, I say again, you were not happy in your choice of events."

"What's that! old-fashioned methods!" cried Fouvenard, running his hands through his hair—a favorite gesture of his, especially when he desired to be impressive, to produce an effect; and it did, in fact, make him a few lines taller by making his hair stand up for the moment. "I have invented nothing, messieurs. I have told the story exactly as it happened. Anyone who doubts it has only to call on Mademoiselle Mignonne, No. 80, Rue de Ménilmontant,—that is, if she still lives there,—and it is probable that she will give him a mass of details concerning her perfidious Ernest, which I have

forgotten. Ernest is my Christian name, messieurs, and that is what she always called me. It is possible that my story shocks you; but, at all events, it's all one to me. I snap my fingers at your displeasure! You make me laugh, with your long, solemn faces! I take reproofs from no one; the man who chooses to administer one has only to speak—I am ready to answer him."

"Oh! messieurs! pray beware!" cried Balloquet, with a laugh. "I warn you that Fouvenard is extremely quarrelsome in his cups. Three or four more glasses of champagne, and he's just the boy to defy us all!"

"I beg you not to make fun of me, Balloquet."

"Ah! the boar is bristling up."

"Monsieur," said I, irritated by Fouvenard's tone and manner, "if you pride yourself on your adventure with this village girl of Sceaux, I fancy that we, on our side, are at liberty to condemn it. It is quite possible that that makes no difference to you. For my own part, I declare that I have deceived many women, but I would never have resorted to such methods as yours to break with them."

"Parbleu! monsieur, perhaps you don't need to take much trouble to induce your mistresses to leave you."

"Frankly, I should prefer that to your expedients; the man who is deceived is often more interesting than the deceiver."

"And you have often been in that interesting position?"

Dupréval put an end to our dispute by rising.

"Messieurs," he said, "I beg you once more to receive my farewell greeting as a bachelor."

We all rose to shake hands with our host. I observed then that Dumouton took the longest road, for he made the circuit of the table. But he had long had his eye on

some superb pears which had not been touched; and, as he passed them, he seized two, which he succeeded, not without difficulty, in stuffing into his pockets, thereby producing the effect of two miniature balloons on his hips; and as they raised the skirts of his coat, they disclosed the fact that the seat of his trousers was of a different color from the front.

We said good-night, took our hats, and prepared to leave the restaurant. But the music was still in progress, playing a captivating waltz, which was like an invitation to ask a lady to dance.

IX

THE WEDDING PARTY IN THE FRONT ROOMS

Balloquet and I were the last to leave the room in which we had dined; and, as we took our hats, we glanced at each other, beating time to the music, and I verily believe we were on the point of waltzing together, when the strains of a polka, nearer at hand, chimed in discordantly with the other music.

"Oho! there are several balls here, are there?" Balloquet asked a waiter, who was looking at us and smiling.

"Yes, messieurs; there are two wedding parties: one right below us, on the first floor, and another on the same floor, but in the salons at the rear."

"Ah! so there's a wedding going on in the rear, too?"

"To be sure, monsieur."

"What time is it now?"

"Half-past eleven, monsieur."

"The wedding parties should be at their height. Are there many guests?"

"A great many, monsieur. They are hardly able to dance, they're so crowded."

"Which is the more brilliant party?"

"They're both pretty fine, monsieur. But the one in front rather beats the other. It's a sweller affair."

"I understand. The one in the rear is more free and easy. They're probably dancing the cancan there. Sapristi! and it's only midnight! The idea of going to bed, when other people are going to pass the night enjoying themselves! when you can hear a lusty orchestra playing tunes that make your legs itch! Do you like the idea, Rochebrune? Don't you feel tempted, as I do, to go to one of these balls downstairs, where they're tripping the light fantastic?"

"I do, indeed! I would go with all my heart. This music makes me dance all over."

"Do you want to bet that I won't go to one of these balls?"

"Do you mean it? You would have the face to do it, when you don't know anyone?"

"Why not? I'll show you what a simple thing it would be. There are two balls. I go to one. If by chance some ill-bred wight sees fit to ask me who I am, whom I know, why, I have my answer all pat: 'I was invited to the other party, on the same floor; I made a mistake, that's all.'"

"Upon my word, that would be an excuse. You make me want to do the same thing."

"Bravo! It's decided: we will both go to the ball. And then, you see, we know so many people! it would be deuced strange if we didn't see some familiar face in

a large party. Then we will just say in an undertone: 'You brought me here;' and our acquaintance will ask nothing better than to be our sponsor. Besides, we will dance, and dancing men are always scarce at balls; sooner or later, it will be the fashion to hire them. They'll be only too glad to have us. Come, which one do you choose; it's all one to me."

"And to me, too."

"Well, I'm a good fellow: the ball in front is more stylish; I'll let you have that one, and I'll take the one behind. Especially, as I feel in the mood for dancing a cancan, if it's a bit *chicardini*. Does that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"We're in patent-leathers and have new gloves. It couldn't be better.—Waiter, just whisk your napkin over our boots. That's right; now we're as refulgent as suns; patent-leather boots are a blessed invention.—Forward! I may be mistaken, but I have an idea that I shall make a good thing out of this ball; and you?"

"I haven't so much assurance as you. But, deuce take it! after all, we're not people without hearth or home. And, as you say, we might easily make a mistake in the party. Come on!"

"That's the talk: forward, to the cannon's mouth!"

We went down one flight; Balloquet humming and hopping; I, slightly flustered, but none the less determined to enjoy myself. We reached the landing between the two balls; we heard both orchestras.

"Good luck!" said Balloquet; and he entered the door at the right, while I turned to the left.

I entered the room where they were dancing. A quadrille was just beginning.

"A fourth couple here! we want a vis-à-vis!" called a gentleman close beside me.—Then he looked at me and said: "Won't you be our vis-à-vis?"

"Gladly," I replied; and glancing about, I saw a lady sitting alone on a bench. I hastened to invite her to dance. She accepted. We took our places opposite the gentleman who had no vis-à-vis; the music began and we did the same; and, lo! I was dancing already before I had had time to look about me and become acquainted with the company into which I had so audaciously thrust myself.

But a man who is dancing never has a suspicious look; nobody observes him or pays any attention to him. It seemed to me that I had taken the best possible means to become acquainted with my surroundings.

After the first figure, I began by examining my partner, whom I had chosen at random, so to speak.

Chance had served me well. My partner was a very pretty brunette; her great blue eyes were at once tender and intelligent, and I deemed them to be capable of saying many things when they chose to take the trouble. A slightly aquiline nose, an attractive mouth, beautiful teeth, which she showed often because she laughed readily, black hair falling in long curls over her neck, a mode of dressing the hair which I have always liked—all these details formed a very seductive whole, and that is what I found in my partner, who was light of foot, slender, with a shapely figure, and graceful in every movement.

Then I looked about. By the manners of the women, the costumes of the men, and the prevalent style of dancing, I saw that I had fallen upon a fashionable assemblage. There was not the slightest suggestion of the cancan; but, by way of compensation, there was a distinct

odor of patchouli. I was not sure whether they were enjoying themselves much; but, at all events, they accepted boredom with infinite grace.

I saw many ugly women; in a large party, it rarely happens that they are not in the majority. That being so, is it surprising that a pretty woman makes so many conquests? If nature created more of them, beauty would receive less adulation; but as it appears only at rare intervals, it attracts more notice.

However, I saw some good-looking women; others who were rather attractive; others (and that too is common experience) who had no other attraction than their youth. But I looked in vain for anyone equal to my partner.

I concluded to open a conversation with her; if, through her, I could obtain some information concerning the bride and groom, find out something as to my hosts, it would be of advantage to me in my embarrassing position.

"I am very fortunate, madame, to have arrived just in time to find you unengaged. That must be a very rare occurrence, and chance favored me."

"But you see, monsieur, I am in less demand than you seem to think; you had only to come forward. Have you just come, monsieur? I don't remember seeing you before."

"Yes, madame, yes; I have not been here long."

"What do you think of the bride? Very pretty, is she not?"

I cast my eyes about me with an embarrassed air; I saw nobody who looked like a bride. My partner, who noticed my hesitation no doubt, continued:

"Can it be that you haven't seen her yet?"

"Faith! I have not, madame; I have just come, and I have had no time yet to look for her."

"Look! there she is over yonder, by the orchestra."

I saw a young woman in the conventional costume, with white bouquet and orange blossoms.

"Do you see her?"

"Yes, madame. But why is she not dancing?"

"Because that great lout of an Archibald trod on her foot just now, and nearly crushed it. What an awkward creature he is! Anna is obliged to rest through at least two quadrilles."

I had learned that the bride's name was Anna. That was something.

"Poor Adolphe was in despair. He wanted to fight Monsieur Archibald."

Adolphe—that must be the groom's name.

"I can well understand that," I hastened to reply. "If I had been in Adolphe's place, I would have been furious, too; for, you know, on the wedding day——"

"He's so fond of his cousin! But, after all, he could hardly pick a quarrel with the bride's brother."

The deuce! I was on the point of putting my foot in it. Cousin—brother—I didn't know where I was. So Adolphe was not the groom. I was treading on very slippery ground, and had to look carefully to my steps.

My partner, who was fond of talking, soon began again.

"As for Monsieur Dablémar, I fancy that he cares very little about it. You know the kind of man he is?"

That question embarrassed me sadly. I wondered who Monsieur Dablémar could be, and I answered, by way of subterfuge:

"Oh! to be sure; Monsieur—Dablémar probably does care very little about it. That is just what I was thinking, especially, knowing him—as I know him."

"Are you very intimate with him, monsieur?"

"Very intimate—why, not precisely, madame—but enough so—to have a—decided opinion about him."

"Do you think that he will make her happy, monsieur?"

"Whom, madame?"

My pretty partner stared at me in amazement as she exclaimed:

"What do you say? whom? Why, his wife, our dear Anna!"

So Monsieur Dablémar was the bridegroom; there was no longer any doubt.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, madame," I hastily replied. "I meant to say that she will be happy, madame, very happy. At least, that is my honest opinion."

"I love to think that you are not mistaken. I knew Anna at boarding school; I know that she has an excellent disposition; and a husband must needs be very uncongenial to induce her ever to complain of her lot. But still, to speak frankly, the other one was prettier."

Once more I was beyond my depth. Who was this other one of whom she was speaking? I turned and looked in another direction; but my partner stuck to the point.

"And yet," she continued, "they say that he did not love her, that he neglected her sadly. You must have known her, monsieur, being a friend of Monsieur Dablémar?"

"Known whom, madame?"

This time my partner looked at me in a very singular way; I was convinced that she believed that she had fallen in with a lunatic. She simply said, with a smile:

"You are absent-minded, aren't you, monsieur?"

"It should not be possible with you, madame."

This compliment changed the current of my pretty brunette's thoughts, and fully restored her amiability.—

Oh! flattery! It is like calumny—some trace of it always remains.

"Your gallantry, monsieur, cannot prevent my thinking that you are absent-minded. Still, you may have reasons for not choosing to answer the questions I asked you."

"Well, madame, it is true, I have reasons—very strong ones, indeed."

"I understand."

Sapristi! she was very lucky to understand; for my part, I confess that that conversation made me much more uncomfortable than I had anticipated; for I was most anxious not to appear a lunatic in the eyes of that partner of mine, who seemed prettier to me every minute. There are people who gain by being looked at, at close range; they are not numerous, but my partner was one of them. And I was terribly afraid that my incoherent replies would give her a very contemptuous opinion of me.

"There goes Monsieur Archibald," she continued, after a moment, "trying to crush somebody else's foot; the way he capers about is perfectly horrible; I will never dance near him."

I did not know where she saw Monsieur Archibald, so I smiled without raising my eyes.

"Of course, you know the lady he is dancing with at this moment?"

"No, madame, no; I don't know her."

"But you haven't looked in their direction."

"I beg your pardon."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

My partner indulged in a burst of merriment which worried me. When she had ceased to laugh, she said:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, pray excuse me; it is very foolish of me to laugh so."

"Why, madame? laughing is most becoming to you."

"But such a strange idea passed through my head, that I couldn't possibly keep a serious face."

"If you would tell me your idea—I should be very happy to be taken for your confidant."

"Oh! I should never dare; for it was you yourself, monsieur, who made me want to laugh."

"So much the better, madame; I am delighted."

"Look you: for some reason or other, you seem to me to be very much preoccupied by something."

"Since I have had the pleasure of dancing with you, madame, there would be nothing surprising in that."

"Oh! monsieur, you are very gallant, I see; but allow me to remark that your preoccupation has no sort of connection with me!"

"Do you think so, madame?"

"What do you suppose just came into my head?"

"I can't imagine; but if you would deign to tell me——"

"You will think me very childish.—Ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, madame?"

"Well, monsieur, I imagined that you had forgotten your handkerchief!"

I could not help laughing with her. Oho! so I had the aspect of a person who had forgotten his handkerchief. In truth, a man who is without that useful article is apt to have an anxious, unhappy look; yes, my partner had thought of something perfectly consistent with the contortions I must have been guilty of while she was talking to me. But, to prove to her that she was mistaken, I drew my handkerchief and blew my nose, although I had no desire to do so.

My partner made a charming little grimace, and said:

"I trust, monsieur, that you will not bear me a grudge for that jest?"

"Far from it, madame; indeed, it proves to me that you are a skilful reader of countenances."

"Ah! monsieur, that is very unkind of you!"

"No, madame, for you guessed that I was much preoccupied, and you were not mistaken; but the cause is much more serious than you supposed."

"Really? And will you tell me what it is?—that is to say, if I am not impertinent to ask you."

"Oh! I should be very glad to confide it to you; but I dare not."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because I am afraid that you would blame me; and I should be so sorry to incur your displeasure."

"Make haste; the quadrille is almost over!"

"It is—it isn't an easy thing to tell.—Do you waltz, madame?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"May I have the first waltz?"

"I am engaged."

"Oh! what luck! If you knew, madame, what a position I am in!"

"Would you have told me your secret while we were waltzing?"

"Certainly."

"You will think that women are very inquisitive, but I accept. I was engaged by a young man whom I don't know; I'll tell him that I made a mistake and that he may have another one."

"Ah! you are extremely kind, madame!"

The quadrille came to an end, and I escorted my partner to the bench from which I had taken her. The

thing for me to do now was to show a bold front in the midst of that assemblage. In vain did I look about in all directions, I did not see a familiar face. The company appeared to be quite select. It was not one of those wedding parties where the guests shriek and make a great noise in order to persuade themselves that they are merry; the men strolled quietly through the rooms, or chatted with the ladies, without any of the shouts of laughter and violent gesticulations which sometimes give to a large party the appearance of a tempestuous sea. The deuce! I found that my presence had been remarked. I met the eye of a stout young man, who had already passed me twice and scrutinized me closely. I felt ill at ease; the self-assurance born of the hearty dinner and the wine I had drunk had already abandoned me; my conversation with my partner, having aroused a most ardent desire to form a more intimate acquaintance with that lady, had instantly dissipated the exhilaration that had led me to commit that signal folly. I was beginning to reflect now, and it must have given me an extremely foolish aspect.—Suddenly I saw that a gentleman had stopped beside me and had taken his snuff box from his pocket. He had one of those faces which resemble the turkey rather than the eagle; a face which might perhaps have been venerable, but for an enormous nose which covered a great part of it. If I could enter into conversation with him, it seemed to me that I should cut a less awkward figure.

X

A PINCH OF SNUFF.—A FAMILY TABLEAU

I stepped toward him, and, although I never take snuff, I put out my hand in the direction of his snuff box, saying:

"With your permission?"

The gentleman was just closing the box, but he hastened to reopen it, and said to me with an expression to which he tried to impart much significance:

"Just try that, and tell me what you think of it."

I saw that he attached great importance to the quality of his snuff. Indeed, when one has a nose of such dimensions, it is natural enough to give much thought to the question of snuff. I took an enormous pinch, and resigned myself to the necessity of inhaling it with all my force. The snuff caught in my nose and throat and eyes all at once. I choked and sneezed, but I tried to dissemble my inexperience and to appear well pleased.

My friend shook his head knowingly, as he asked:

"Well! what do you think of it?"

"Excellent! delicious! I have never taken any so good."

"Parbleu! I believe you. Do you recognize it?"

"No, frankly, I do not. But, perhaps, by trying to—wait a moment."

I did what I could to prolong the conversation, for I was determined not to part with my interlocutor until the orchestra played the first measure of the waltz. Unluckily, I was not well posted on the subject of snuff.

"It's of no use for you to think," continued the man with the snuffbox. "It's a mixture that I make myself. There's *robillard* in it, and Belgian, and caporal."

"Ah! I thought there was some caporal. I recognized that."

"There's very little of it. When I have mixed them in just the right proportions, I add two or three drops, no more, of *eau de mélisse*."

"Ah! that's what it is; I said to myself: 'It seems to me that I recognize that taste.'"

"The taste is barely perceptible; but it lessens the strength of the *robillard*, which makes people sick sometimes."

"*Fichtre! robillard* is quite capable of it, especially on an empty stomach. I have known people, who—but, after all, it depends on whether you're used to it."

At that moment, I cut such an idiotic figure in my own eyes that I was tempted to laugh in my own face. Luckily, I had to do with a party who seemed to be of about the same calibre.

"Monsieur," he said, as he closed his snuffbox, "this is the result of protracted study; and yet, I never studied chemistry!"

"You astound me! I would have sworn that you were a chemist, simply on the strength of your snuff."

"That is what many people have said; but I ought to tell you that I have taken snuff ever since I was thirteen years of age."

"You are quite capable of it!"

"It was prescribed for a disease of the eyes—which, by the way, it didn't cure. I tried to make Anna take it for an ear trouble she had at seven years of age; but I couldn't do it. You can't imagine, monsieur, all of that

child's devices to avoid taking snuff. In the first place, she used to hide my snuffbox, and more than once she threw it out of the window; then she filled it with very—unpleasant things; I prefer not to say what they were, but she spoiled my snuff, and she tried to disgust me with it. Ah! what a mischievous little witch! Who would believe it now, eh?"

I made no reply, for his mention of Anna reminded me that my partner had called the bride by that name. Was I conversing with some near relation of the newly married pair? The thought disturbed me, and I tried to lead the conversation back to the snuff. Once more I held out my hand, saying:

"I wonder if I might venture to ask for another pinch—it's so very good! And now that I know what it's made of, I shall relish it better."

My gentleman solemnly took his snuffbox from his pocket, and was about to open it, when a girl of fourteen or fifteen years, and very ugly, ran up to him, crying:

"Uncle Guillardin, you mustn't forget that you're going to dance with me first; I want to dance, I do, and I've missed three already."

"Yes, yes, don't worry, Joliette; I'll dance with you, as I promised."

"The next one?"

"Yes, the next one."

"Cousin Archibald invited me twice, too, and then he didn't come to get me; that was awfully mean of him. I told him I'd complain to you, and he said: 'Go and polk, and let me alone.' That was all the nastier of him, because he knows I can't polk."

Monsieur Guillardin—I knew now my snuff taker's name—opened his box and offered it to me; and paying

no further heed to the little girl, who remained by his side, he said:

"One day, monsieur, when I had persisted longer than usual in trying to make Anna inhale a few grains, it occurred to her to blow into the box with all her might just as I handed it to her. You can imagine the result: the snuff filled my eyes—she had taken the precaution to close her own; I suffered horribly, and for two whole days I couldn't see. But after that, I ceased trying to give her snuff.—Take a pinch."

I sacrificed myself a second time. I have no idea how I succeeded in inhaling it, but I know that my eyes smarted and that I felt strongly inclined to weep.

Mademoiselle Joliette, the inaptly named little girl, who had remained with us, roared with laughter.

"I should think monsieur was trying to be like you, uncle, when Cousin Anna blew into the snuff box," she said.

"What! are you still here, Joliette? Go back to my daughter, for you are maid of honor, you know, and your station is beside the bride."

But Mademoiselle Joliette began to smile in a singular fashion, which raised her eyebrows—they were naturally too high—and gave to her face the effect of a mask. Her eyes were fixed upon me; she apparently had something to say, and dared not say it; my presence seemed to embarrass her. For my part, being by that time perfectly sure that the individual with the huge nose was the bride's father, I deeply regretted having addressed him, and I looked every minute in the direction of the orchestra, hoping to see the musicians take their instruments.

Monsieur Guillardin seized the opportunity to fill his own nostrils with snuff; that operation took some time, for

each of them must have held half an ounce; but suddenly Mademoiselle Joliette threw up her head and began:

"Well, I don't care, uncle; I'm going to tell you why I am staying here. It's because Cousin Archibald, who was staring at monsieur, said to me just now: 'Joliette, go and ask father who that man is that he just gave a pinch of snuff to, and that he's talking to now. I don't know the man, and I don't think he's been here long. I want to find out who he is, because there are sharp fellows who sneak into wedding parties sometimes when they are not invited, so as to stuff themselves with cakes and ices. But I don't propose to have any such tricks played on us.'—That's what my cousin told me to ask you."

Imagine my plight; imagine the figure I cut while that detestable little Joliette was saying all this. I am certain that I changed color several times. However, I took the boldest course; I forced myself to laugh, and to act as if I considered the question extremely amusing. When he saw me laugh, the venerable gentleman with the huge nose deemed it fitting to do the same, murmuring:

"Ha! ha! That's a pretty good one! I recognize my son Archibald there. Oh! he's a hothead. Ha! ha! ha! why, if anyone should presume to join our party without an invitation, he'd annihilate him; he'd begin by jumping at his throat, like a bulldog. Ha! ha! it's very amusing! My dear love, just go and tell him that monsieur is—that monsieur's name is—that I am talking with——"

Monsieur Guillardin looked at me as he uttered these incomplete sentences. He was just beginning to realize that he too did not know me, and he awaited my reply with his nostrils open wider than his eyes.

I cannot describe my sensations; I felt huge drops of perspiration on my forehead, my mouth was parched.

It was not stout Archibald's wrath that alarmed me; but to be treated as a suspicious character, as an intruder who had come there to get ices and punch! Ah! that thought drove me mad, and I realized all the impropriety of my conduct. I would have been glad to vanish through a trapdoor, like stage demons, and take the risk of breaking a bone or two in my descent.

At that moment the orchestra gave the signal for the waltz.—O blessed music! never didst thou seem to me so sweet, so melodious, so alluring! I bowed to the bride's father, saying:

"I beg your pardon, but I am engaged for this dance."

And I fled toward the pretty brunette, who was my last hope, my anchor of safety. Probably my face betrayed a part of the torment and anguish that I had just experienced, for the lady rose quickly and put her arm about me. We began to waltz, and she at once opened the conversation.

"What in heaven's name is the matter, monsieur? you seem much less cheerful than you were—and that secret that you were to confide to me——"

"Oh! I am going to tell you everything, madame; I shall be too happy if you deign to be indulgent to me, and to understand that this is only an escapade, reprehensible no doubt, but undeserving of—— Mon Dieu! I don't know what I am saying."

"Speak, I beg you; explain yourself."

"Of course—I believe I am treading on your foot now."

"That's of no consequence."

"First of all, madame, I must tell you that my name is Charles Rochebrune, that I was born in Paris, of respectable parents; I can easily prove what I assert."

"Great heaven! do you take me for an examining magistrate? Why do you tell me all this?"

"So that you may know that I am not a mere vagrant. I had some fortune once, and I still have about eight thousand francs a year."

"Does this mean that you desire to marry me, monsieur? It is my duty to warn you that I am married."

"No, madame, no; I don't say all this as a prelude to asking your hand; but so that you may know that I am not a nobody, a vagabond."

"Oh! I assure you, monsieur, that you haven't the look of one."

"True; but looks are so deceitful that sometimes—— Mon Dieu! now I am out of step."

"Never mind; pray finish."

"Very well! understand, then, madame, that I dined at this restaurant to-day with a number of other persons, all men. The dinner was given by Dupréval, a solicitor, who is about to marry. We celebrated his farewell to bachelorhood and drank to his approaching marriage; which is equivalent to telling you, madame, that the champagne was not spared. The dinner was prolonged to a late hour; we heard the music of this ball and of the one in the rear—for there's another wedding party there."

"I know it, monsieur. Well?"

"We were just going away, another young man and myself, who were the last to leave our dining-room, when the music, the delicious waltz they were playing, gave birth to the most insane idea."

"Ah! I believe I can guess."

"A little enlivened by the champagne, seduced by the melodious music—in short, madame, Balloquet said to

me—Balloquet is my friend's name: 'Let's join the festivities, although we are not invited. Do you go to one, and I'll go to the other. If anybody notices our intrusion, if we are questioned, we'll say that we have made a mistake in the party.'—I allowed myself to be led away by Balloquet's reasoning; he went into the other ballroom, and I—I came here."

Instead of being indignant, as I feared, my partner burst into a hearty laugh, which the music hardly sufficed to drown. I allowed her to laugh freely for several seconds, then I continued:

"So you forgive me, madame?"

"Oh! absolutely, monsieur. What you have done doesn't seem to be very criminal. It's a little audacious, perhaps, but so amusing!"

"But, madame, it is most essential now that somebody should act as my sponsor; for the bride's brother, Monsieur Archibald, has noticed me; and just now, while I was conversing, unwittingly, with an immense nose, which proves to belong to the bride's father——"

"Monsieur Guillardin?"

"Even so. Well, as I was saying, a young person, instructed by this corpulent Monsieur Archibald, came and asked Monsieur Guillardin who I was. It seems that Monsieur Archibald is not always affable, and that he would probably take this pleasantry of mine badly. As for myself, madame, I realize that I have done wrong, that I have been guilty of a reckless piece of folly; but if this Monsieur Archibald tells me so in unseemly language, I swear that I am not of a temper to put up with it."

My pretty brunette had ceased to laugh.

"In truth," she murmured, "Anna's brother is the sort of fellow who doesn't understand practical jokes. He's

a fool, and, being a fool; he is exceedingly sensitive; he loses his temper and quarrels over an idle word. He is very strong, it seems, and that gives him much self-assurance."

"It matters little to me how strong he is! I am no boxer, myself, and I don't fight as street porters do."

"Mon Dieu! what is to be done?"

"If you would condescend, madame, to be kind enough to say that I am an acquaintance of yours, that you invited me to come here—in a word, if you would present me?"

"I would ask nothing better if I were alone here; but my husband is with me, and he knows everything and sees everything; he's worse than the *Solitaire*. He would ask me instantly where I met you."

"See, madame, how they are staring at me already! Look, as we pass Monsieur Archibald, he points me out to several gentlemen standing near, and I have no doubt that he is saying to them: 'Do you know that man?' and they all say *no*."

"Oh! mon Dieu! you make me shudder, monsieur!"

"Look out for me when the waltz comes to an end—and I fancy that will be soon."

"But I don't want them to turn you out. You waltz so well—really, it would be a great pity."

"You are too kind, madame; however, if I am not taken under somebody's protection, it looks as if the affair would turn out badly for me."

"Mon Dieu! if only Frédérique were here! she would get you out of the scrape on the instant, I know."

"What! a lady named *Frédéric?*"

"Yes, monsieur—Frédéri—que."

"Ah! I understand, the feminine of Frédéric. And this lady?"

"She expected to come to Anna's wedding; she promised me she would; but she hasn't come."

"They are quickening the pace; a few turns more, and I shall be ignominiously expelled! What I shall regret most of all, madame, is you—who have been so indulgent to me, and whom it is impossible to see for an instant without ardently desiring to see you again."

"Oh! monsieur——"

"However, if Monsieur Archibald is discourteous, if he doesn't choose to accept a proper apology, I promise you that I will show him that he hasn't a dastard to deal with."

"Oh! don't talk like that! you make me tremble. If I should see my husband, I——"

My pretty partner did not finish her sentence; the music stopped, the waltz was at an end. But, almost instantly, my partner uttered a joyful exclamation and dragged me toward the outer door of the ballroom, saying in an undertone:

"Come, come; you are saved; here is Frédérique!"

XI

MADAME FRÉDÉRIQUE

I have no need to say whether I allowed myself to be guided by my pretty brunette. We forced our way through the crowd, at the expense of a number of feet which came in our way; my partner held my hand, and I pressed the protecting hand with which she held it, so that it could not escape me.

We reached the door of the ballroom just as a lady, newly arrived, was coming in. My conductress rushed to meet her, dragged her into a small room set apart for those who wished to converse, and, still without releasing my hand, led her into a window recess, apart from everybody, and said to her, laying her hand on her arm:

"Frédérique, you have arrived in the nick of time to confer a great favor on monsieur, and on myself, who—who take an interest in monsieur."

"What must I do? Tell me, my dear Armantine. I am all ready."

"Listen: you know monsieur, you invited him to come to the wedding, where he was to ask for you; but as you had not arrived when he came, he didn't know to whom to apply. Now that you are here, you must introduce him. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly! it's the simplest thing in the world! Take my hand, monsieur, if you please; for, as I am to present you, you must be my escort, for a few moments at least."

"With great pleasure, madame!"

"How lucky it is that I came without an escort, and that my husband has catarrh! It's a true saying that good fortunes never come singly."

"You will condescend, then, madame, to——"

"Why, it's all arranged; I am delighted to do anything to oblige Armantine. By the way, your name, monsieur, if you please; for, if I am to present you, I must call you by name."

"Charles Rochebrune."

"Very good! An advocate, I suppose? All the young men are advocates."

"I am not in practice; but I studied for the bar."

"That is quite enough. Now, let us go into the ballroom."

My new acquaintance passed her arm through mine and leaned on it as if we had known each other for years. I felt altogether reassured; I walked with my head erect, my face had recovered its serenity, and I was no longer afraid to look about me.

My partner left us as we entered the ballroom, and the lady on my arm asked me in an undertone:

"Do you know my name?"

"I know only that one by which she called you just now."

"I am Madame Dauberny, eight years married; I am twenty-seven years old, and my husband forty-four; he is wealthy and has no business. He doesn't care for society, balls, etc., but I go about without him. I was born at Bordeaux, and my parents were of the same province. I think that you are well enough posted now, in case anyone should talk to you about me."

"Yes, madame; thanks a thousand times!"

What I especially admired was the ease and fluency with which my companion said all this to me as we walked

through the crowd; I am certain that no one who saw her talking to me would have suspected that she had never seen me until that evening. But Monsieur Guillardin and the bride came forward to meet my protectress, and I saw the stout Archibald too, walking behind his sister, and continuing to scrutinize me closely while he saluted Madame Dauberny.

"How late you are!" cried the bride, taking my companion's hand.

"We were in despair!" said the venerable proboscis; "it is half-past twelve, and we were just saying that Madame Dauberny would not come, although she had promised to."

"And here I am, you see. I never break my promises. Ah! that makes Monsieur Archibald laugh; however, it is quite true, monsieur."

"I was laughing with pleasure at seeing you, madame."

"You are too polite, monsieur. But I am the more culpable for being so late, because I have caused sad embarrassment to an unfortunate young man to whom I had said that I would be here at eleven, and that he need only ask for me and I would present him. I refer to monsieur, who has been looking for me here nearly an hour, so he tells me; and, failing to find me, he didn't know to whom to appeal. Allow me to introduce Monsieur Charles Rochebrune, a distinguished advocate—and a mighty dancer. I thought that you would readily welcome a friend of my childhood."

At that, I made a profound bow to the bride and her father, and to the hulking Archibald, who condescended to smile upon me, while Monsieur Guillardin exclaimed:

"All friends of yours are welcome, fair lady! I trust that you do not doubt it. But I have already had the

pleasure of making the acquaintance of monsieur, who appreciates my snuff. But I confess that I didn't know with whom I was talking, and I was just about to ask him, when he left me, to go and waltz. If he had told us that he came at your invitation, that would have been enough to ensure him a hearty welcome."

"You are too kind, Monsieur Guillardin, but Monsieur Rochebrune is quite as well pleased to have me here;—are you not, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame," I replied, with an expression that made Madame Dauberny smile; and it seemed to me that that smile caused Monsieur Archibald to make a wry face.

"But where is Monsieur Dablémar? I don't see him anywhere."

Madame Dauberny had hardly asked the question, when a short man, dressed in good taste, but very slight and with an affected manner, came running toward us, crying:

"Ah! here she is at last, the one person we longed so to see, and of whose coming we had despaired! I must dance with you; I engage you for the next dance—that is to say, if you will deign to grant me that favor."

"We will see—later. I never dance as soon as I arrive; pray give me time to look about."

"My poor Anna has had to rest a little while; her brother trod on her foot; and he did well, too, for it is a good thing for her to rest: she was dancing too much, she——"

This gentleman, in whom I had no difficulty in discovering the bridegroom, stopped suddenly when he caught sight of me, evidently for the first time. My introductress, who had dropped my arm for a moment, took my hand and said to him:

" Monsieur Charles Rochebrune, a good friend of mine, whom I take the liberty to present to you."

Monsieur Dablémar bowed to me, as courtesy required. Thus I had been well and duly introduced to the bride and groom and the bride's kindred; I was one of the wedding party, and I could walk about fearlessly through the salons.

Having no longer anything to fear on my own account, my first pleasurable occupation was to scrutinize at my leisure the woman who had so gallantly come forward to be my buckler, and who, although she did not know me, although she had never seen me, had been willing to take my arm and to present me to a numerous assemblage as a person whom she knew intimately. I realized that she had done it at the request of a friend, to whom, as well as to me, she undoubtedly thought that she was doing an important service; but, none the less, there was a flavor of audacity in the performance that pleased and charmed me. Was it devoted friendship? was it recklessness of disposition? was it eccentricity, originality? I had no idea as yet, but I was deeply indebted to the lady, for she had extricated me from a bad scrape.

In the first few moments after my introduction, I was too excited, too preoccupied, to think of examining the person who introduced me; all that I could say was that, at first glance, she seemed to have a very becoming air of originality. Now that my embarrassment had vanished, and Madame Dauberny was talking with the bride, I could venture to examine her.

The person whom my pretty partner had called Frédérique was rather above middle height, rather slender than stout, but exceedingly well formed, with a something brusque and cavalierish in her gait and her carriage

which was wonderfully becoming to her; her foot, while not remarkably small, was well formed; she carried her head erect, and slightly thrown back, and often rested one hand on her hip, like a man.

Madame Dauberny was not precisely a pretty woman; indeed, one might have passed her without noticing her; but the more you looked at her, feature by feature, her charm inevitably grew upon you; for there was a great deal of expression in her very mobile countenance. She was a brunette in the fullest acceptation of the term; her hair was of such an intense black that it was almost blue; this is not a witticism; extremely black and glossy hair sometimes has a bluish tinge; but such hair is rarely seen.

Her eyes were very dark blue, well shaped, and with abundant lashes; she fixed them uncompromisingly upon the person with whom she was talking, and they seemed to defy you to make them look down or humble themselves before anyone on earth. They denoted a woman of strong character, an energetic woman. Shall I say, a passionate woman? I think that I should err: strong natures are able to hold their passions in check, instead of allowing themselves to be dominated by them, like—— But I must finish my portrait. Gracefully arched, heavy eyebrows—but not too heavy—surmounted those expressive eyes; the nose was a little large, but straight, and the nostrils, slightly dilated, opened but little more when she smiled. She had a large mouth, and her lips were rather thin; but the teeth were very white and regular. That mouth was well adapted to raillery and persiflage; and it was most eloquent in expressing contempt and anger.

Madame Dauberny was naturally pale, and even by candle light her skin was not white. She had an oval chin and a high forehead. So much for her features; but

all these details give a very insufficient idea of the general effect of that unusual face. It was necessary to see her in order to understand her; in the short time that I spent in examining her, her face changed entirely three or four times.

There was one thing that pleased me greatly, and that was her accent, in which there was a faint suggestion of the *Midi*, which, to my mind, is fascinating in a woman. She had a well-modulated voice, like almost all those who are born on the banks of the Garonne; it was not soft, but the accent deprived it of anything like harshness. And then, it reminded me of a fascinating Bordelaise, whom I had loved dearly, and known such a short time! On the whole, I was decidedly flattered to be considered Madame Dauberny's friend. But that did not cause me to forget my agreeable partner, to whom also I was deeply indebted. I was anxious to learn something concerning the pretty brunette. I tried to make up my mind to ask her friend Frédérique about her.

At that moment, she came toward me and whispered as she took my arm:

"Will you be my escort once more?"

"Ah, madame! I am too happy that you deign to accept me as such."

"Let us make a few turns about the room, and I will finish my task of giving you such information as you need concerning the company; then you will be free to return to Armantine."

"Armantine? Oh, yes! that is the lady who spoke to you in my behalf?"

"To be sure. You know her, do you not?"

"Not at all. I never saw her before; but I had danced a quadrille and waltzed with her."

"Well! this is a little strong! And what was the source of her deep interest in you?"

"The fact that I had told her of a mad prank I had just committed; of which I will tell you as well, with your permission."

"I not only permit it, but I insist upon it; for, after all, it is well that I should know something about the friend of my childhood."

I told Madame Dauberny the story that I had previously told her friend. She listened attentively, without moving an eyebrow. Her impassiveness frightened me. But when I had finished, she shook her head and smiled slightly, murmuring:

"It was a little *risqué!* So your friend is at the other ball?"

"Yes, madame."

"And your friend's name is——?"

"Balloquet."

"What does he do?"

"He is a doctor."

"There's no great crime in all this, provided that you really are, as you say, an honorable man."

"Ah, madame!—this suspicion——"

"Is fully justified, it seems to me; for, after all, monsieur, you may be a very bad character, one of those young men who cannot be received in good society. You may have said to yourself: 'I'll go and have a little sport at the expense of all those people!'—What would there be surprising in that? Oh! what a face you are making! Be careful, or people will think that I am making a scene; and when a woman makes a scene with a man, it means that she has some claim upon him. You must see that your long face is compromising to me."

I was horribly vexed; certainly she had a right to suspect me; but the mocking tone she had assumed, her manner, which denoted anything but conviction, and the expression of her face, augmented my chagrin, and I did not know what to say. How could I prove to her that I had not lied?

At that moment, a man of some forty years, stylishly dressed, and not ill-looking, but with a vague and shifty look in his eyes, stopped in front of us and paid a compliment or two to the incredulous Frédérique. I glanced at the new-comer, whose face was not unfamiliar; he caught my eye and bowed to me very affably. I cannot describe the thrill of pleasure which that bow afforded me, although I did not know who had bestowed it upon me.

"Ah! do you know Monsieur Rochebrune?" Madame Dauberny inquired.

"Yes, madame, I have met monsieur several times in company, notably at Général Traunitz's and at Madame de Saint-Albert's receptions."

"True," said I, searching my memory; "I remember very well having had the pleasure of meeting monsieur at those receptions."

"To tell the truth," rejoined Madame Dauberny, "I should have been surprised if Monsieur Sordeville had not known you, knowing all Paris as he does, and all that everyone is doing, all that takes place!"

"Oh, madame! you accredit me with much more knowledge than I possess," replied Monsieur Sordeville, smiling with what he intended for an affable expression, which accorded ill with the natural character of his face. "You are very late, madame; Armantine was distressed at your non-appearance; which, however, did not prevent

her dancing. But Monsieur Rochebrune can tell you that, for I saw him waltzing with my wife, and very well, too, I assure you."

"What, monsieur! was it your wife with whom I had the pleasure of waltzing?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Why, what extraordinary mortals you are!" cried Madame Dauberny, looking from one to the other, with an ironical expression. "You know each other, and yet monsieur does not know that it was Madame Sordeville with whom he waltzed?"

"What is there so surprising in that, madame? I have met Monsieur Rochebrune at parties to which my wife did not accompany me; that happens every day. Because one is married is no reason why one should not go out sometimes without his or her spouse; and I may say that you yourself are proving the truth of that statement this very evening."

Monsieur Sordeville said this in a meaning tone. Now that I knew that he was my charming partner's husband, I examined him more closely. He was very good-looking; his features were regular, and he had rather a distinguished face; but I was not attracted by it.

Meanwhile, Madame Dauberny had not remained passive under the little shaft Monsieur Sordeville had let fly at her; but I did not hear her rejoinder, because my pretty partner came up and took her husband's arm just as her friend was speaking to him.

"My dear Armantine," said my patroness, "you do not know, do you, that your husband is acquainted with Monsieur Rochebrune, whom I took the liberty of bringing to this festivity? He's a terrible man, is your husband; if I had undertaken to introduce anyone here under a

false name, he would certainly have discovered the whole intrigue."

The pretty brunette smiled and blushed slightly; then she put her arm through her friend's and led her away, but not before I had whispered in Madame Dauberny's ear:

"Well! are you convinced now that I did not lie to you?"

"I never thought that you were lying," she replied, squeezing my hand as a man would do.

Monsieur Sordeville remained with me. He seemed inclined to continue the conversation, and I asked nothing better than to become more fully acquainted with the husband of a lady who pleased me exceedingly. For if he had a face which did not attract me, I was at liberty to think of his wife while I was talking with him.

"She is an extremely agreeable person—Madame Dauberny!" Monsieur Sordeville began.

"Yes, she is very agreeable; she seems to have much wit."

"Have you never before been in a position to judge of her wit?"

I bit my lips; I had said a stupid thing; but I hastened to add, in an off-hand tone:

"What I meant to say was that she has even more wit than she allows to appear on the surface."

"Ah! do you think so? I must say that it seems to me that she doesn't hide what wit she has."

I saw that I should have difficulty in extricating myself; when one has strayed into a bad road, it's the devil and all to get back to solid ground. And then, too, that Monsieur Sordeville had an embarrassing way of making

one talk. The bride's brother happened to be passing us at that moment. He stopped and said to Monsieur Sordeville:

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Madame Dauberny."

"Madame Dauberny! Oh! she's a *gaillarde*, she is!"

Monsieur Sordeville raised his eyebrows slightly as he replied:

"Hum! that word is a little strong!"

"Why so? I mean by *gaillarde* a decided character, which never bends, and does nothing except in accordance with its own desires; which takes its stand above a multitude of everyday prejudices, and snaps its fingers at what people will say. Indeed, Madame Frédérique—she prefers to be called that, you know, for she detests her husband's name—Madame Frédérique, I say, makes no bones of declaring that she does only what she pleases, and that she intends to do everything that she pleases. When a woman says that, I should say that one may well call her a *gaillarde!*"

Monsieur Sordeville smiled, and said simply:

"People say so many things that they don't do! Sometimes, it is to obtain a reputation for originality."

"And you, monsieur," continued Archibald, turning to me, "you, who are one of Madame Frédérique's early friends, do not you share the opinion of her which I have just expressed?"

I saw that Monsieur Sordeville was covertly watching me, and I replied, measuring my words:

"Since I have had the honor of knowing Madame Dauberny, monsieur, I have always recognized in her the possessor of many invaluable qualities, and a keen wit, slightly satirical perhaps; as for her faults, I know

of none; but clever people are becoming so scarce that they may well pass for originals."

My interlocutors held their peace. Monsieur Sordeville shook his head, and Monsieur Archibald pursed his lips. The orchestra played the prelude to a quadrille. I determined to perform a noble deed, which would put me on good terms with the bride's family: I invited Mademoiselle Joliette to dance.

The ugly child accepted with unbounded delight. While we were dancing, I saw Madame Dauberny looking at me with a smile that seemed to say:

"That's a very clever thing you are doing."

For my own part, I hoped to reward myself in the next quadrille by inviting the seductive Armantine.

But while we were executing the final figure, a great uproar suddenly arose outside the door; people were shouting and quarrelling in the corridor, and I fancied that I recognized Balloquet's voice. Either he had not been so fortunate as I, or he had been guilty of some imprudence. I ran in the direction of the outcry.

XII

THE WEDDING PARTY IN THE REAR ROOM

As I stepped out into the hall which separated the two ballrooms, the dispute seemed to be growing warmer. I could distinguish Balloquet's voice perfectly, shouting:

"Once more, messieurs, I tell you it's a mistake, a simple mistake. What the devil! any man may be mistaken. I mistook one party for the other. Wedding parties are a good deal alike, as a rule, especially

after the dancing begins. There's not enough harm done to whip a cat for."

The waiters did their utmost to restore peace, testifying that Balloquet had dined upstairs with some most respectable gentlemen.

I succeeded in forcing my way through the crowd. I saw a number of grotesque faces, which would not have been out of place in the *Charivari's* caricatures. Most of the men had retained beneath their gala dress the vulgur or stupid air which the finest coat cannot conceal. They were all very hot against poor Balloquet, who was as red as a cherry and gesticulating in the midst of them like one possessed. A stout man of some fifty years, whose eyes looked as if they were made of glass, they were so expressionless and so protruding, held him by the arm and kept repeating:

"You don't get off like this, *bigre!* You either belong here or you don't, that's all! Proofs! proofs! I want proofs!"

A tall, fair-haired young man, with a weak, stupid face, and hair brushed flat over his forehead almost to his eyebrows, seemed to be threatening Balloquet, as he said:

"And what did you do to my wife? tell me that! Did you or didn't you? Pétronille ain't capable of lying about it. She told me you pinched her! That's a pretty way to do—pinch the bride, when you don't belong in the party! If you'd been invited to the wedding—but that wouldn't be any excuse."

"I was dancing, monsieur le marié; my hand may have gone astray. If I did pinch her anywhere, I thought it was part of the figure, and——"

"Oh! that's a good one! that don't seem reasonable!"

"But, monsieur, you don't understand."

"You don't get off like that, *bigre!*" cried the fat man with the glassy eyes; "proofs! proofs! proofs!"

At that moment, to add to the uproar, a corpulent dame of at least sixty years of age, with a flat nose, smeared with snuff, her face encircled by a flaxen false front, the curls of which, artistically grouped in terraces, made her look as if she wore whiskers, and overladen with flowers, ribbons, lace, and false jewelry, appeared in the midst of the men, crying in a shrill voice:

"I don't want Pamphile to fight! I forbid him to fight! What's it all about? You shan't fight, Pamphile—I'd sooner fight myself, in my son's place. O my son, I'm your mother, or I ain't your mother! Monsieur's an intruder, a villain, a blackguard. Throw him out of doors! Call the watch!"

"No, madame, I am not a villain," retorted Balloquet, glaring savagely at the old woman, who was bedizened like a circus horse; "and I'll prove it."

"Go back to the ballroom, Madame Girie; this is no place for you; we don't need a woman's help to settle this business."

"I tell you, I don't want my son to fight!—Come, Pamphile, come back with me; don't get mixed up in this row."

"Oh! do let me alone, mamma! Go back with the other ladies."

"No! no! I don't want you to fight because monsieur pinched your wife. Mon Dieu! what a terrible thing! In the first place, Pétronille had no business to tell you of it. God! if the late Girie had fought every time anyone pinched me! But I didn't tell him! I took good care not to complain! I was too fond of my husband to

do that; and he—oh! he loved his lovely blonde! You ought to hand monsieur over to the watch.—Watch! watch!"

Madame Girie persisted in shrieking: "Watch!" waving her arms, striking everybody within reach, and increasing the confusion immeasurably by trying to restore peace.

It was at that moment that I succeeded in reaching Balloquet's side, and released him from the man with the glassy eyes.

"What's all this, messieurs?" I exclaimed.—"What has happened to you, my dear Balloquet? Why are all these people so incensed with you?"

Balloquet uttered a cry of joy at sight of me, and cast a haughty glance at his adversaries, saying:

"You see that I didn't lie to you, messieurs; here's my friend, who is a guest at the other wedding and has come in search of me.—Isn't it true, Rochebrune, that you have come to fetch me, and that I am Arthur Balloquet, medical practitioner, and that I am not the sort of man to be turned out of doors?"

"Proofs! proofs! proofs!"

"I don't want my son to fight!—Listen to your mother, Pamphile!"

"You pinched Pétronille; I stick to that!"

"But I made a mistake!"

"Watch!"

"In God's name, Madame Girie, be good enough to hold your tongue!"

A small man, whom I had not yet seen, as he was hidden by the crowd, succeeded in passing his perfectly curled blonde head under Madame Girie's ear rings, and said, gesticulating freely after the manner of Mr. Punch, for he bore a strong resemblance to a marionette:

"Allow me! allow me! we must try to understand each other. Monsieur says he came to my cousin Pamphile Girie's wedding party by mistake; but a mistake like that don't last an hour, and monsieur's been with us more than an hour. I noticed him; he drank punch every minute; he made more noise than all the rest of the company, and I said to myself: 'That man's a *boute-en-train!** Oh! he's a famous *boute-en-train!*' But monsieur must have discovered that he didn't know us; that the bride and groom were not the ones who invited him. It seems to me that that's good, logical reasoning. I'm a logical man!"

The little automaton was not such a fool as one would have supposed at first sight. Balloquet was at a loss for a reply to his speech. I made haste to take the floor.

"Messieurs, my friend Arthur Balloquet has not deceived you; he is a most estimable physician, and incapable of offending you intentionally. He mistook the salon, that is all; you must not see anything more in the affair than there really is in it."

"And I was so comfortable where I was," said Balloquet, "that I could not make up my mind to go away."

This compliment allayed the ferocity of the vitreous-eyed gentleman. However, he was about to repeat his demand for proofs, when, on turning his head, he saw Monsieur Guillardin, who had come out to ascertain the cause of the uproar, accompanied by Madame Dauberny. She came to my side and whispered:

"I presume that your friend Balloquet has been putting his foot in it?"

As I said *yes* with my eyes, we heard a cry of surprise:

"Why, there's Monsieur Guillardin—my landlord!"

* That is, a leader in revelry or merrymaking.

"Himself, Monsieur Bocal. What are you doing here, pray?"

"What am I doing? Why, I am marrying my daughter Pétronille to Monsieur Girie here.—Come forward, Girie; come, I say, and speak to my landlord, to whom I sent cards, I am sure."

The tall, fair-haired youth came forward with the loutish air that never left him, and bowed sheepishly to Monsieur Guillardin. This incident produced a fortunate diversion; attention was diverted from Balloquet, although Madame Girie continued to mutter:

"Oh! if my son should fight, I should be sick three times over! But he shan't go out, or, if he does, I'll follow him! I'm capable of anything where Pamphile's concerned. When he ain't home at eleven o'clock or twelve, I go and sit at the window, and there I sit all night, till he comes home. When I hear a horse, I says: 'There's my son.'—Sometimes I don't have anything on but three undervests and two chemises! but I don't care; I snap my fingers at the risk of catching cold!"

But nobody listened to Madame Girie. Monsieur Guillardin, having acknowledged the salutations of Monsieur Bocal and long-legged Pamphile, said to the former:

"Faith! my dear monsieur, this is a curious coincidence. I'm here for the same purpose that you are."

"I don't understand."

"I have married my daughter to-day, and we're celebrating the occasion right beside you here."

"Is that so? can it be possible? This other wedding party is yours? I mean, that you're marrying your daughter—no, giving her in marriage?"

"Yes, monsieur," interposed Madame Dauberny; "and I have been waiting a long while for Monsieur Balloquet

to ask me to dance. I told him that I should be at Mademoiselle Guillardin's wedding."

Balloquet stared in amazement when that lady, whom he did not know, called him by name; but he replied at once:

"I am at your service, madame; but, you see, I was trying to explain matters to these gentlemen, and——"

"Oh! that's all over! let's not say any more about that!" cried Bocal, grasping Balloquet's hand. "If I had had any idea that you were invited to my landlord's wedding party!—Madame, messieurs, we shall be much flattered if you will honor us with your presence, if you will deign to come to our ball.—I beg you, Monsieur Guillardin, to do me that honor. Let me present Pétronille—Pamphile, go and call Pétronille.—Come, madame and messieurs, pray take a turn at our ball.—Cousin Ravinet, make our friends stand aside and make room for my landlord."

Cousin Ravinet was the little man who talked like Mr. Punch; he rushed into the room where Monsieur Girie's wedding was being celebrated, crying:

"Here comes my cousin's landlord! He's coming to our party. Bocal's bringing him.—A little music, please. I say there, you in the orchestra!"

The musicians supposed that he was calling for dance music, and they began to play a polka. Monsieur Guillardin, impelled almost by force by his tenant Monsieur Bocal, found himself in the ballroom at the rear. Madame Dauberny and I followed him, as did Balloquet, the latter being escorted almost in triumph by the bridegroom, who had taken his arm.

"You ought to have told us right off that you were a friend—a friend of friends of ours," said Girie. "Then

we wouldn't have quarrelled. As you're invited to the party of my father-in-law Bocal's landlord, why, give me your hand! I must insist on your dancing the next dance with Pétronille."

"You're too kind, Monsieur Girie. As for the mistake I made in pinching your good wife——"

"Nonsense! don't say any more about that! It was a joke—just a joke! Look you, if you're a good fellow, you'll stay with us—as long as you're enjoying yourself. Now we know each other, we'll have some sport; we'll raise the deuce. It's agreed, ain't it? You stay with us; and at supper I'll take good care of you."

"What's that? you're going to have a supper?"

"Parbleu! I should say so! What does a party amount to without supper? You'll stay, won't you?"

"Faith! Monsieur Pamphile, you are so kind—your company is so lively; I'm tempted to let the landlord's party go by the board."

Madame Dauberny and I were walking behind them, and heard every word of their conversation. She had taken my arm as if we were old acquaintances, and she said in an undertone:

"It will be fortunate if your friend Balloquet stays here, for I think that he's a little exhilarated, and if he should come to Anna's ball he might say something that would compromise us by betraying our little fraud."

"You are entirely right, madame; but you need have no fear: Balloquet will stay here. He has been told of a supper to come, and he is one of those persons who never refuse a meal, even when they have had four during the day."

"That speaks well for his digestion.—Mon Dieu! just look: I believe that they propose to make us dance now.

Monsieur Bocal is trying to induce his landlord to polk. It must be that the man's lease is nearing its end, and he wants to renew it."

The music had, in fact, excited Monsieur Bocal, who deemed it his duty to walk in step and was almost polking when he presented his landlord to his daughter Pétronille, who was a plump, chubby-cheeked wench, very fresh and red, with no other recommendation than her youth.

Monsieur Guillardin took out his snuffbox and offered it to the bride, who muttered:

"Snuff! Sneeze all the time I'm dancing! I guess not! And I haven't got a handkerchief, either."

"Do you polk?" Madame Frédérique asked me.

"Yes, madame."

"Very well; then let us take a turn. I prefer to make my entry dancing; it will be more amusing. Indeed, I see some faces already that make me long to laugh. Come, monsieur, they say that you waltz beautifully; let us see if you polk as well."

We started off. I was in luck that evening: after an excellent waltzer, I found myself with a partner who polked to perfection. We danced forward and backward, and turned in every direction. Our manner of dancing seemed to arouse the admiration of the company, for I heard people say as we passed:

"Look! there's a couple who dance pretty well!"

"Just look at those two; see what pretty steps they take!"

"Who are those people?"

"They belong to the party in front, the wedding party of Monsieur Bocal's landlord's daughter; Monsieur Bocal invited them."

"They polk mighty well; they must be ballet dancers at least."

"I'll bet they belong to the Opéra."

Madame Dauberny heard this last. She laughed heartily, but that did not interfere with her running comments on the wedding guests:

"Look at that couple yonder; for ten minutes they have been in the same spot; they are trying to polk, and can't go forward or back.—You will notice a tall woman in pink, in the corner at our left, with a garland of green leaves on her head; she has struck the attitude of a caryatid, and seems disposed to weep.—And see those two ladies, or demoiselles, polking together, and bumping into everybody.—And that little man hopping about with a tall partner."

"That's Cousin Ravinet."

"On my word, there are some sweet caricatures here! There are some very good-looking girls, but they look like grisettes; probably that's all they are. I am very curious to know what Monsieur Bocal's business is."

The music stopped. The heat was stifling in the ballroom.

"I have had enough of it," said Madame Dauberny; "besides, I believe that Monsieur Guillardin has returned to his daughter. Take me back to the other party; then you may return here, if you choose."

"I beg you to believe, madame, that I too prefer the company of which you are one."

"I believe you; I should be sorry for you if it were otherwise. But you must return and speak to your friend Balloquet. Balloquet! you must agree that that is a singular name for a physician. If I were ill, I would never put myself in the hands of a doctor named Balloquet!"

"So you think that the name is of some consequence, do you, madame?"

"Much, monsieur; if your name had been Balloquet, I could never have made up my mind to say that you were a friend of my girlhood."

While we talked, we had returned to the Guillardin party, of which I was now a duly accredited member. But as a quadrille was beginning just as we entered the ballroom, Madame Dauberny seated herself by the door, and I stood beside her, delighted to be able to continue my conversation with the amiable Frédérique; for to my mind she was extremely amiable, and if I had not been in love with her friend Armantine—— But it is so pleasant to be in love, even when it amounts to nothing, and vastly more so when it may amount to something. I was still in the dark as to how it would be with my new passion; but one is always at liberty to hope.

"I am under great obligations to you, madame, for what you have done for me to-night."

"Mon Dieu! you have already expressed your gratitude, monsieur! I trust that I shall hear no more of it."

"You know now, madame, that I have sometimes met Monsieur Sordeville in society; but that is not enough for me. I should be glad to make myself known to you more fully; and if you will allow me to call and pay my respects to you——"

Madame Dauberny looked at me a moment with a strange expression; I would have liked to know what was passing through her mind; but she soon replied, with her deliberate air:

"No, monsieur, no; I will not allow you to call on me; indeed, why should you do so?"

"Why, to have the pleasure of being with you, madame; and because I desire to make myself better known to you; and——"

"No; it's unnecessary, I tell you. I am entirely convinced, monsieur, of your good faith in all that you have told me; what more can you desire?"

"Nothing in that direction. But when one has once had the pleasure of being your escort, it is painful, madame, to think of the possibility of never seeing you again."

"Never! That is a word that ought to be stricken from the dictionary, monsieur, don't you think?"

"I agree with you, madame, for it is a very sad word."

"And false three-quarters of the time. However, if you really wish to see me again, don't be disturbed; you will have an opportunity."

"Where, madame?"

"At Armantine's."

"Madame Sordeville's? But I know her no better than I do you."

"True; but her husband knows you. Talk a little more with him, and I will undertake to say that he'll invite you to his house."

"Do you think so, madame?"

"Try it, and you will see. Ah! here's the terrible Archibald coming toward us. Beware, or you will make an enemy of him!"

"How so?"

"Because I am sure that he thinks you are making love to me. He is capable of believing even more than that; and you must know that he has made me a declaration of love."

"I presume that that must be a common experience with you."

"That is quite true."

"And Monsieur Archibald has simply followed a road which many men are tempted to take."

"Look you, monsieur, I agree that a man may make a declaration of love to a woman, without meaning anything in particular; that is the commonest thing in the world; and if a woman is ever so little coquettish and attractive, she can safely bet that she will extort a declaration from every man she knows. So there's no great merit in that. But because a woman is less coy than another, because she says frankly what she thinks, because she doesn't play the prude and isn't afraid to laugh at a joke, because, in a word, she has in her manners more or less unconstraint, originality, character, boldness if you will—to imagine, therefore, that that woman is likely to be an easy conquest, that a man has only to—you can divine what I do not say—— Well! monsieur, that is a very grave mistake, born either of stupidity or monumental conceit."

Did she say that for my benefit? I could not tell. Still, I had made no declaration; and although I had expressed a wish to see her again, to thank her again, it seemed to me that that was perfectly natural after the service she had rendered me. No; she simply meant to give me a warning. But in that case she must be convinced that I proposed to make love to her? She was mistaken, for I thought only of my charming partner, Madame Sordeville.

The quadrille came to an end, and I left my place, thinking that I would return for a moment to the other ball, to make sure that Balloquet would not come in

search of me, and to see what he was doing as Monsieur Bocal's guest. From the glimpse I had caught of that other function, I fancied that there were likely to be some amusing sights there, and that love was probably treated there in another fashion than in the salons at the front of the house.

XIII

THE BRIDE AND GROOM AND THEIR KINSFOLK

At Mademoiselle Bocal's wedding feast, punch, mulled wine, and *bischoff* were circulating all the time, and the ladies partook of that species of refreshment as often as the men. From this fact it will be understood that at the Bocal ball there was an enthusiasm which threatened to develop into wild revelry. Most of the ladies were as red as poppies; some of them laughed incessantly; others, who were presumably very sentimental in their cups, rolled their eyes in a languishing way that drove you back to your entrenchments; others, whom the punch made melancholy, heaved prodigious sighs and were damp about the eyes.

As for the men, they were almost all loquacious and noisy, and I believe that I might safely say, tipsy.

When I entered the ballroom the second time, I looked about for Balloquet. I discovered him sitting beside a brunette with a headdress of roses, whose cheeks were of a brilliancy and lustre that dimmed the hue of the flowers. Their conversation was so animated that the young doctor in embryo—for to that class Balloquet belonged—did not notice me, although I had planted myself directly in front of him.

I concluded to tap him on the shoulder.

"Monsieur Balloquet," said I, "I would be glad to say a word to you, if possible."

"It isn't possible at this moment. I am engaged. I am explaining to mademoiselle the proper method of applying leeches."

And Balloquet gave me a meaning glance. I understood that his interview had reached an interesting point, and I was about to walk away, when I felt a hand on my arm. It was the little marionette named Ravinet, who was trying to make fast to me, and shouting—for everybody in the room shouted instead of speaking:

"Ah! you're one of the landlord's guests; I recognize you. You're the man who polks so well! It's very polite of you to come back to us. You'll polk again, won't you? If you want to please Aunt Chalumeau, you'll invite her; poor, dear woman, she's never polked in her life, and she's dying to. Her hair dresser told her she had the right make-up."

I had no inclination whatever to put Aunt Chalumeau's make-up to the test, and I told Cousin Ravinet, who struck me as being well primed, and persisted in hanging on my arm:

"I will tell you in confidence that I shall not polk again for some time; I am very tired."

"Oh! that's a pity. Do you belong to the Opéra?"

"I? No, indeed!"

"Are you related to my cousin's landlord?"

"No; I am a friend of his."

"And that lady who was dancing with you don't belong to the Opéra, either?"

"By no means."

"We all thought you did. You jigged it so well!"

"Monsieur Ravinet——"

"Ah! you know my name!"

"I have that honor. Do me the favor to tell me what Monsieur Bocal's business is."

"What's that! don't you know my cousin?"

"I know that he's the bride's father, and that he's Monsieur Guillardin's tenant; that's all."

"What! you don't know Bocal the distiller's shop, on Rue Montmartre? He's one of the largest distillers in Paris."

"Ah! he's a distiller, is he?"

"Why, everybody knows him!"

"I must tell you that I very rarely have dealings with distillers."

"He's the man who makes the syrup of punch—that's a famous brew! Did you ever drink it?"

"No; and I am not anxious to."

"Oh! you must take some, and tell us what you think of it.—Come here quick, Cousin Bocal! I say! here's a gentleman from your landlord's party; he's never tasted your punch."

The stout man with the glassy eyes stopped at Cousin Ravinet's summons; then he came to me and gripped my other arm, saying with an effusiveness that scorched my cheeks, for he had the unpleasant habit of speaking within an inch of your nose:

"Ah! monsieur, you're one of my landlord's guests. Surely you won't insult me by joining us without taking something?—Here, waiter!"

"You are too good, Monsieur Bocal, but——"

"The punch is made with my syrup; it's perfumed, and sweetens your breath."

"That is what I was just saying to monsieur, cousin——"

"I say there! waiter!"

"Waiter! bring some punch! My cousin is calling you!"

Cousin Ravinet was determined to do his part. The two men held me so that I could not escape. A waiter arrived with a salver. I realized that I should get into serious difficulty if I refused; it would be quite likely to draw down upon me the wrath of Madame Girie, whom I spied in a corner, whispering with some other women. So I swallowed the glass of punch, hoping that I should be set free; but I was disappointed. Monsieur Bocal led me away toward his daughter Pétronille, saying:

"You must dance with the bride."

"It's a very great honor, but——"

"Oh! you must dance with her. My landlord refused to dance, but he's an elderly man. But a famous dancer, a zephyr, like you, can't refuse."

I did not know how to evade the honors with which I was overwhelmed. Monsieur Bocal had already said to his daughter:

"Pétronille, you're going to dance with monsieur—my landlord's friend."

"But, papa, I am going to dance with Freluchon."

"What do I care for Freluchon! I tell you, Pétronille, you're going to dance with monsieur; and you'll see how he dances. All you've got to do is stand straight——"

"But I promised poor Freluchon two hours ago, and he's gone to wash his hands on purpose, because he's lost his gloves; he'll be mad."

"For heaven's sake, Monsieur Bocal," said I, "don't let me interfere with your daughter's plans! I will dance with her later; I should be very sorry to offend anyone."

"On the contrary, monsieur, it will give me much pleasure," said Bocal. "I don't care a snap of my finger whether Freluchon's angry or not. The idea of putting ourselves out for him! Not much! You shall dance this dance with the bride. Hark! there goes the orchestra; take your places quick!"

Escape was impossible. What had I tumbled into? Those people were as obstinate as mules, and a refusal on my part would irritate them; people of little education are always extremely sensitive with fashionable persons, for they feel their inferiority; they are afraid of being laughed at, when no one has any idea of laughing at them.

I made the best of it and took my place beside the bride, who did not act as if she were overjoyed to dance with me and probably regretted Freluchon.

"Who's going to dance opposite the bride?" shouted Monsieur Bocal, in stentorian tones.

"I am! I am! here I am!"

And a tall, thin, bald-headed old man appeared, leading by the hand a girl of seven or eight. There was a vis-à-vis which would not afford me any distraction! I heard a muttering behind me, then groans, then Monsieur Bocal's voice above all the rest. It was probably Monsieur Freluchon, indignant to find that he had washed his hands for nothing.

The quadrille began. The bride went into it with all her heart; she was a buxom wench, who had made up her mind to let herself go on her wedding day, and was determined to do what she had set out to do. If only I did not get in the way of her feet, I felt that I should be lucky. The tall old man, who stood opposite her, danced with a zeal deserving of the greatest praise; he persisted in taking all the little steps and even essayed some leaps

and bounds; the perspiration rolled down his face after the second figure, but he did not omit a step. He was a conscientious dancer, and would have been in great demand under the Empire. The little girl hopped about in every direction, and made a mess of every figure; she was always behind me when she should have been in front; but I was indifferent and let her wander about at her pleasure.

I was convinced that Cousin Ravinet had spread the information that I was a famous dancer, for there was a crowd about our set. The good people must have been sadly disappointed, as I did nothing but walk through the figures. Indeed, I heard some voices muttering:

"Bah! it wasn't worth while to put ourselves out; I can dance better than that. Ravinet must have seen double; he don't even know how to do the *basque* step!"

I felt called upon to try to talk with the bride.

"You must be tired, madame?"

"Tired? why?"

"You have probably been dancing a long while."

"*Dame!* if the bride didn't dance, it would be a pretty wedding! The men have to ask me to dance; that's what they were invited for."

I bit my lip, as I rejoined:

"This is a very happy day for you, madame, is it not?"

"A happy day! Oh! it's rather amusing just now; but I've found it pretty stupid all day!"

"Ah! is that so? But I presume that you love the man you have married?"

"Oh, yes! well enough, as far as that goes; not too much; but it'll come; pa said it would come."

"Would it be impertinent of me to ask what your husband's business is?"

"My husband's? He sells sponges, at wholesale; we're going to keep a sponge shop."

"That must be a good business."

"*Dame!* I don't know anything about it. I shan't like it very much to be among sponges all the time. But we won't have any dog, anyway; that was one of the first conditions I made."

"Ah! you don't want a dog; I judge that you dislike dogs?"

"Mon Dieu! no, I like all kinds of animals. But it's on account of the song."

"Ah! is there a song about dogs?"

"About the *Sponge Man's Dog!* Don't you know that song?"

"No; I must admit that it is entirely unknown to me."

"It's a comic song; every verse ends like this: 'And it was the sponge man's dog.'—Everybody knows that refrain, and pa says to Pamphile: 'If you had a dog, people would always sing that song when they saw him. That might injure your business.'—And Pamphile says: 'I'll never have a dog, I swear,' and I married him. Pa did well, didn't he?"

"I admire Monsieur Bocal's foresight."

"He insisted, too, that my mother-in-law shouldn't live with us."

"In that respect I applaud him; for mothers-in-law seldom agree with their daughters-in-law."

"Especially as Madame Girie—— Why, she's a woman that would set mountains to fighting if she could; and yet, she says she adores her children! it's amazing how happy they've been with her! Pamphile's younger brother was very delicate, so she said; she insisted on his purging himself all the time, taking cathartics

and enemas. When he came home at night after dining out, Madame Girie was always waiting for him on the stairs, with a syringe. If he refused to have an enema, she'd chase him through all the rooms. The next day, she'd purge him without telling him, by putting something in his coffee. In fact, she pestered the poor boy so with what she called her little attentions, that one fine morning he went off and enlisted in the dragoons; he preferred that to being syringed."

"Faith! I believe that I would have done the same if I had been in his place."

"Madame Girie said he was an ingrate. She didn't want her other son, Pamphile, to marry, so's he could stay with her. You can see that that prospect didn't tempt him, especially as Madame Girie wanted to run the business, and as she found a way to quarrel with all the customers. One day, she refused to sell a man sponges, because he didn't bow to her when he came in; another time, it was a woman who spoke to her as if she was a servant. In fact, if she'd stayed with Pamphile a while longer, it would have been all up with his business; for no one would come there to buy. Well! here we are married. We make Madame Girie an allowance, but it won't be enough for her, you see! she's never had any idea how to take care of money, she always runs right through it.—Ah! it's our turn, monsieur; this is the *poule*."

When the *poule* figure was at an end, the bride said to me, with an ironical air:

"It don't seem to me that there's any need of my holding myself so straight to dance with you. They said you were such a fine dancer!"

"Cousin Ravinet was mistaken, madame, in saying that I danced well."

"Oh! as to that, if you were dancing with the lady you had a little while ago, you'd jump higher, I suppose."

"I beg you to believe that no partner could induce me to jump any higher."

"Freluchon dances mighty well, I tell you; he bounds like a rubber ball."

"That is a gift of nature, and I would not contend with the gentleman. Is he a relation of yours?"

"Freluchon? No; he's head salesman in pa's shop. He cried when he heard I was going to be married."

"The deuce! was it with pleasure?"

"Well, I guess not! it was with something else. But I consoled him; I told him I'd be his friend as long as we live, and that he could kiss me every Sunday."

"I can imagine, madame, that such a prospect dried his tears."

"It's our turn! it's our turn!"

The quadrille was over at last. I escorted the bride to her place, and dodged the glasses of mulled wine that were circulating in all directions. Someone seized my arm; I jumped back in dismay, fearing that it was either Monsieur Bocal again or little Ravinet.

But it was Balloquet, who led me to a corner of the room, where we sat down upon an unoccupied bench. My medical friend seemed to be in very high spirits. He began to laugh before he spoke to me.

"Well! my dear Rochebrune, I should say that we had succeeded in our undertakings, eh? What an excellent idea it was of mine, that we should join these wedding parties!"

"True; but suppose I hadn't appeared with Monsieur Bocal's landlord—what then? It seems to me that you

were in for a bad quarter of an hour! What the devil had you been doing?"

"Nothing; it was just a joke. The little woman I was talking with just now had excited me; and then, the way they drink here is something terrific. Faith! while I was dancing with the bride, my hand went astray. That idiot of a Pamphile did nothing but say to us: 'I've married an apple! My wife's as solid as one!' And I just wanted to see if it was true. I give you my word that he flatters himself. But that's all gone by now; the husband adores me. What do you think of this party?"

"I prefer the one I belong to."

"How did you arrange your affair?"

"I was sorely embarrassed; but two charming women took me under their protection. Afterward, I found a gentleman there who knew me. But, for all that, my dear Balloquet, don't be imprudent enough to come into the other ballroom. The company is very different from this; you might be questioned, and——"

"Never fear; I'm very well off here, and I shall stay. In the first place, there's to be a supper, and I have always had a weakness for that sort of amusement. And, secondly, I have my hands full: I am at work on a brunette —the one I was colloguing with just now. I like her immensely; I propose to give her my custom. She's a Madame Satiné, Boulevard des Italiens; a fashionable quarter, where gloves are very dear. She says she's a widow; all the attractions at once. She's no light-footed nymph, but good, solid flesh and blood, and no prude, either. We dine together to-morrow; that's already arranged."

"I congratulate you; you do business promptly."

"And you—have you found anything to make it worth your while?"

"I have made the acquaintance of a charming woman; but I don't know yet whether it will go any further."

"The one who came here with you?"

"No; that was my second protectress."

"Do you know that she has a regular—military air. *Bigre!* how she looked at me!"

"Yes, there is a touch of decision in her manners. She is clever and original; but she's not the one I am making up to."

"I say! who in the devil is this old woman standing in front of us and making faces?"

I looked up and recognized Madame Girie, who had halted in front of Balloquet and myself and had her eyes fixed upon us, raising her eyebrows, smiling—in a word, indulging in a pantomime which was certainly intended to compel us to speak to her.

There was no way of escaping her; for, as soon as I raised my eyes, Madame Girie made a minuet courtesy and stepped forward, saying in a tone in which she clearly intended to announce the mistress of the feast:

"Have you had some punch, monsieur, or some *bischoff?* Have you taken anything?"

"Yes, madame; I am infinitely obliged to you, I have taken many things."

"You see, Monsieur Bocal is so heedless! He talks a great deal and makes a lot of noise, and acts as if he wanted to manage everything; but, as a matter of fact, he don't do anything at all; and if I wasn't here to look after things—— I am the bridegroom's mother, monsieur."

"You are quite capable of being, madame," said Balloquet, rising and bowing to Madame Girie; then he walked away and left me to my fate. I would have been glad to

follow Balloquet's example; but Madame Girie at once took his seat by my side and seemed disposed to remain there. I felt a cold perspiration break out all over me. The bridegroom's mother turned toward me and continued the conversation:

"Yes, monsieur, I am the bridegroom's mother. That magnificent boy is my son; he looks like me, don't he, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame; he has your expression."

"My expression—that's it exactly; you've struck it! He wanted to marry. I wanted to be everything to him. 'Stay with your mother,' I says; 'you'll be much happier! What more do you need?'"

"But, madame, it seems to me that a mother can hardly take the place of a wife; and I imagined that a mother's greatest happiness was to live again in her grandchildren."

Madame Girie took from her pocket a handkerchief redolent of snuff, and rejoined:

"Oh! certainly, monsieur, a man can marry; but he'd ought to make a good choice, and that's so hard!"

"Do you mean that you are not satisfied with the choice your son has made?"

"Hum! hum! I don't want to speak unkind of my daughter-in-law, monsieur; I ain't capable of it; but if I was inclined to! In the first place, she's as stupid as a pot, that little Pétronille is. But you've been dancing with her, and you must have found it out."

"Why, no, madame; I found her *naïve* and natural."

"Ha! ha! silly [*niaise*] enough, ain't she? You're frank, you are! However, Pamphile was cracked over her, and I don't know why; for she ain't pretty."

"She's very fresh."

"*Dame!* if a girl wasn't fresh at her age! But she's running to fat, and I won't give her three years before she's a sight. And then, she's been brought up in such a curious way! Having no mother, she's done just as she chose, you see. Alone all day long with the clerks; young men, too—I actually believe she went down into the cellar with 'em! Fie! fie! what actions! catch me choosing that hussy for my son's wife! But he wouldn't listen to me, when I says to him: 'You'll repent of your bargain.'—You just wait a little while, monsieur, and you'll see. There's a certain Freluchon,—one of Monsieur Bocal's clerks,—who was dead in love with Pétronille. Everybody knows that; why, she didn't conceal it herself, but just laughed about it!—a modest girl doesn't laugh at such a thing.—This Freluchon taught her to swim—do you hear, monsieur?—to swim, in the river; she went into deep water with him! Fine doings! And Pamphile thinks that's all right. 'Look out what you're doing!' I says to him.—Oh, monsieur! what fools men are when they're in love!"

"That is a profound truth, madame; but it does little honor to your sex; if women really were what men suppose them to be when they're in love, men wouldn't be such fools to love them."

Madame Girie pursed up her lips, shook her head, and smiled, as she said:

"Thank God! all women ain't Pétronilles!"

"And all mothers-in-law aren't like you, madame!"

I don't know whether Madame Girie took that for a compliment, but she bowed low. For my part, I had had quite enough of the excellent dame's chatter, so I left my seat and the ballroom, where the odor of mulled wine and punch was beginning to be insufferable.

XIV

A YOUNG DANDY.—A DELIGHTFUL HUSBAND

Returning to the Dablémar function, I drew a long breath of delight; a pleasant odor of patchouli and muslin replaced the fumes of mulled wine, which were intensified on the other side of the corridor by a multitude of other emanations. The temperature, too, was endurable, and the faces of the guests did not glisten with drunkenness and perspiration, which impart to the countenance a gloss that does not embellish it.

My first care was to look about for Madame Sordeville. I discovered her talking with her friend Frédérique, and with them was a young man whom I had not yet seen.

This new personage was twenty-eight to thirty years of age, and was dressed in the height of fashion. He was very dark, and his hair, artistically parted and curled, was beautifully glossy. A long, pale face, regular features, black eyes somewhat sunken, a small, tightly closed mouth, a slight, carefully trimmed moustache, made him a very good-looking fellow; but a self-sufficient, conceited air, which almost amounted to impertinence—that too I observed in my scrutiny of that young man, who, at the very outset, and for some reason which I could not explain, made a most unpleasant impression on me.

We often feel sympathies or antipathies for persons we do not know; and when we are in a position to become better acquainted with such persons, it rarely

happens that the instinctive prevision of our hearts is not justified. So that we must have a sort of second-sight, of the heart, which warns us when we are in presence of a friend or an enemy.

This gentleman was talking with the two ladies, with a familiarity that seemed to denote a close intimacy. Was he probably the lover of one or the other? Suppose he were of both? Such things have been seen. One thing was certain, and that was that there was no trace of the discreet lover about him.

You will consider that I have a low opinion of women. It is not of women alone, but of the world in general that I have such an opinion. It is not my fault; why has it so often given me reason to think ill of it?

I did not approach them, for the presence of that handsome dandy annoyed me; but I watched them. I must have been very dull-witted not to discover with which of the two ladies he was on most intimate terms. There are many little nothings by which people always betray themselves, unless they are constantly on their guard; and even then!

Ah! my mind was made up! A hand placed a little too familiarly on the fellow's knee, a long glance, which said things that are not said in public, told me that he was intimately associated with Madame Dauberny. I was conscious of a joyful thrill, for I had feared for a moment that it was with my charming partner, and, frankly, that would have distressed me. Therefore, I was certainly in love with her.

I walked toward the group, and spoke to Madame Sordeville, who replied with her usual affability. But while I was talking with her I noticed that my fine gentleman with the moustache eyed me from head to foot with

something very like impertinence! I wondered how long that would last.

There are such people in society; people whose impertinent glances force you to pay them back in their own coin in a way which is almost a challenge, and which signifies plainly:

"Have you anything to say to me? I am waiting, and I am all ready to reply."

As that superb *lion* did not cease to stare at me, I stared back at him in the manner I have described. He lowered his eyes and turned his head. That was very lucky! But you may be quite certain that from that moment my gentleman and I could not endure each other.

As it seemed to annoy him to see me talk and laugh with the charming Armantine, I put all the more fire into my conversation; and as she laughed very readily, I continued to incite her to laughter.

Madame Dauberny whispered in the young man's ear; I noticed that he frowned slightly and compressed his lips. Was she telling him what she had done to help me out of my predicament? What difference did it make to me whether her action pleased or displeased the fellow? Madame Frédérique no longer seemed to me so attractive as before; no, she certainly was not pretty. Moreover, what she had said to me in our last interview had cooled my feeling for her considerably.

Madame Sordeville was engaged for the next contra-dance, but she promised me the next but one. Her partner came to claim her. The superb Frédérique stood up with her dark-eyed swain. What was I to do during that quadrille? It is a terrible bore not to dance at a ball in polite society, where you know no one.

I concluded to find Monsieur Sordeville, remembering the advice Madame Dauberny had given me before her cicisbeo's arrival.

I discovered Armantine's husband in an adjoining salon, in a group of men, most of whom were decorated; he was not talking, but listening to the others. I walked toward him, and he came to meet me.

"Aren't you dancing, Monsieur Rochebrune?"

"I am resting."

"I'll wager that my wife isn't; she is indefatigable!"

"Madame Sordeville is dancing, it is true; and Madame Dauberny, too—with a young man whom I had not noticed before—a dark young man with a moustache."

"Ah, yes! Saint-Bergame. He came very late, as usual; one produces a greater effect by making people wait for one. Ha! ha! But you must know him, if you have been a friend of Madame Dauberny from childhood. You must have met him often at her house."

Again Monsieur Sordeville's smile was tinged with mockery. I answered, this time without embarrassment:

"I saw nothing of Madame Dauberny for a long time, until very recently."

"Then it must have been during that time that she made Saint-Bergame's acquaintance; their liaison is hardly six months old. But he is on a very intimate footing with her, none the less; however, that is easily seen."

The tone in which Monsieur Sordeville said this left me in no doubt that he had the same opinion that I myself had formed concerning the relations between these two. But if he believed it, it seemed strange to me that he should allow his wife to be so intimate with Madame Dauberny as she seemed to be. Was there not reason to fear

that the evil example might be contagious? or was Monsieur Dauberny's conduct such as to excuse his wife's? or again, was Monsieur Sordeville one of those philosophical husbands who look upon all such things as mere trifles undeserving of their attention? I was tempted to believe that the last conjecture was nearest the truth.

"Who is this Monsieur Saint-Bergame?" I asked, after a moment.

"Hum! I have no very definite idea. However, he represents himself as a journalist. But nowadays, you know, a man is a journalist just as he is an advocate. Everybody writes for the newspapers, or at least tries to create that impression."

"I know that the profession of journalist is an honorable one, when it is carried on without prejudice or passion, when one writes with impartiality. I will not say, with spirit and good taste, for those qualities should be indispensable prerequisites of admission to the guild. Unluckily, it is not always so. Since newspapers have become so numerous, all the unappreciated poets, all the unsuccessful authors, have turned journalists. These gentry, having failed to induce anyone to produce their plays, fall furiously upon those authors who succeed. Luckily, the real public does substantial justice; often, indeed, the very extravagance of the insults heaped upon a man of talent simply intensifies the public interest in him. And, after all, it is a pitiable thing, it seems to me, to pass one's life tearing to tatters those who produce! It is the old story of the he-goat in the fold: he does nothing, and attacks whoever wants to work."

"You don't seem to be fond of journalists?"

"I think very highly of them when they are intelligent and their criticisms are decent. I once knew a very

popular literary man, who laughed till he cried over the savage attacks that the journalists made upon his works. 'If I were not successful,' he would say, 'those fellows would not honor me with their hatred. They would not say anything about me unless it were to offer me some patronizing compliment. Ah! my dear fellow, congratulate me! Everybody cannot have enemies.'—But, to return to Monsieur Saint-Bergame: for what newspaper does he write?"

"Really, I can't tell you; for some new sheet—more than one, perhaps. He has the reputation of being very bitter, and prides himself on it."

"He has no reason to. Nothing is so easy as to say unkind things; the conversation of cooks and concierges is principally made up of them."

"I believe, too, that Saint-Bergame has had a long play in verse accepted at the Odéon, or at the Français, or perhaps at the Théâtre-Historique. But he's been talking about it a long, long while, and nobody else ever mentions it."

"And are these monsieur's only titles to the admiration of his contemporaries?"

"I know of no others. However, he's a good-looking fellow, dresses well, and follows all the fashions. He's a *beau cavalier;* so you must not be surprised if all the ladies fight for the honor of capturing him."

"Oh! I am surprised at nothing."

"But do you not cultivate the arts, Monsieur Rochebrune? I should say that I had heard of songs and ballads of which you are doubly the author, having composed both words and music."

"Yes, monsieur, that is true. But one is no more a literary man because one can write a ballad, than one is

a composer because one has composed an air and worked out a piano accompaniment for it."

"Mere modesty on your part, monsieur; you can't make me believe that a man can compose an air without being a musician."

"One may be like Jean-Jacques, who had not the slightest conception of counterpoint."

"I don't know whether Rousseau was a consummate musician, but I wish that somebody would give us something equal to his *Devin du Village*."

"I am with you there, monsieur, although it should have a new orchestration."

"My wife is a fine performer on the piano, and she has a good voice; we have music at our house on Thursdays; that is the day the music lovers assemble. If it would be agreeable to you to hear them and to join them——"

"You are too kind, monsieur; it will be a very great pleasure to me. I can listen to music twelve hours at a time, without tiring."

"We shall rely upon you, then, monsieur, on Thursdays especially. But you will be welcome at any time. Do you know our address?"

"No, I do not."

"Here is my card."

Having handed me his card, Monsieur Sordeville walked away. On my word! a charming husband! he anticipated my dearest wish. And yet, he did not act like a simpleton. Oh, no! he certainly was not one of those obliging husbands who see nothing of what goes on under their roofs. Madame Frédérique was right in her prediction that he would invite me. I was decidedly puzzled; but I could see nothing in it at all that augured

ill for me. Madame Sordeville was very pretty, very captivating. I felt that I should love her passionately. I did not know whether she was inclined to follow her friend Frédérique's example, but I had permission to call at her house, and that was something.

As soon as the quadrille was at an end, I once more approached the spot where the two ladies had established themselves. Monsieur Saint-Bergame was still with them; but he did not frighten me—he bored me, that was all.

I cannot say whether the invitation I had just received had given me an air of triumph; but when she saw my face, Madame Sordeville smiled and exchanged a glance with her friend. I would have given—I cannot say how much, to know the meaning of that glance.

Monsieur Saint-Bergame said to Madame Dauberny, with a curl of the lip, and an affectation of familiarity:

"Do you expect to stay here long?"

"Why not? I am in no hurry; my mind is at rest; Monsieur Dauberny won't sit up for me."

"This party seems to me intolerably dull."

"You are exceedingly polite! For my part, I am enjoying myself immensely."

"Oh! you enjoy yourself everywhere, madame!"

"That is creditable to my temperament, at all events."

"There's a curious mixture of faces here—it's not homogeneous."

"Very good! try to write an amusing article about it; it will be a windfall to you."

"On my word, you are very sharp this evening!"

"I thought that you were used to it."

"The next contra-dance is mine, you know, madame?" I said to Madame Sordeville.

"Yes, monsieur, to be sure; I have not forgotten it."

Her manner as she made that reply was charming. Women have a way of saying the most trivial things which gives them enormous value in our eyes. That depends considerably, however, on one's frame of mind.

The orchestra began to play a polka. I looked disconsolately at my pretty partner.

"Do you polk?" I asked.

"No. I waltz, but I don't polk."

"But I do," said Madame Dauberny, holding out her hand. "And you know how well we danced together. Suppose we see if we can succeed as well here as at Monsieur Bocal's ball?"

What an extraordinary woman! she said that as if we had known each other ten years. She was very pretty in my eyes at that moment. I hastened to take her hand, and we began to dance. I enjoyed it all the more because I had observed Saint-Bergame's horrible scowl.

We danced for some time without speaking, and, vanity aside, I believe we performed very creditably. After we had twice made the circuit of the room, I could contain myself no longer.

"Doesn't that gentleman who was with you polk?" I murmured.

"I was sure that you would ask me that!"

And she began to laugh. In truth, my question was most idiotic. But I am very prone to say such things. I am always conscious of it afterward, which is a little late. For fear of making a fool of myself again, I did not say another word. Thereupon my partner asked me:

"Have you spoken with Monsieur Sordeville again?"

"Yes, madame."

"And he invited you to his house?"

"Yes, madame."

"What did I tell you? We guessed as much by your radiant expression just now."

I knew then the meaning of the glance they exchanged when I approached them. But I did not like that: "*We* guessed as much"; that identity of thoughts and sentiments was by no means pleasing to me. I have always noticed that the women who tell each other everything, their inmost thoughts and the most secret impulses of their hearts, never have anything left to confide to their lovers. With them they act, but do not lay bare their hearts. Friendship is almost always injurious to love. That is not my understanding of a profound sentiment, a genuine attachment.—But what am I moralizing about?

I took the indefatigable Frédérique back to her friend. The handsome dandy was no longer there. I heard Madame Sordeville whisper:

"He has gone. He said he was going away; he was furious."

"Really? That doesn't disturb me in the least!"

But my gentleman had not gone. I saw him not far away. If he was jealous of me, he was sadly astray: I was thinking exclusively of Madame Sordeville and waiting impatiently for the quadrille, so that I could talk with her more freely.

That moment arrived at last. I stood up beside my partner; each cavalier did the same. O blessed moment! What an excellent invention is dancing!

I felt that I must make the most of my opportunity; I told Madame Sordeville that her husband had invited me to come to their house. She smiled, but made no reply. I could not rest content with that.

"May I hope to be so fortunate, madame, as to obtain from your lips a confirmation of the invitation I have received?"

"Whatever my husband does is well done, monsieur, and I can only approve it."

That was a courteous reply, but nothing more. It seemed as if my fair partner were distraught. It is never very flattering to one's self-esteem to have the person to whom one is talking thinking of something else; and when that person is a woman with whom one is in love, it is much more mortifying. I was on the point of making a declaration of love, but it did not pass my lips. Could it be possible that she was nothing more or less than a coquette who had been amusing herself at my expense? Nonsense! Had I already forgotten all that she had done for me that evening? Wounded self-esteem often makes us very unjust. I determined to wait and not to go so fast, either in forming my judgments, or in my love.

When the dance came to an end, many of the guests prepared to go away. Madame Sordeville rejoined her friend, who also seemed disposed to retire. What was there to detain me there? I had permission to call upon the charming Armantine, and that was all that I could expect.

I left the restaurant. As I passed the rooms where the Bocal wedding party was still in full blast, I heard a good deal of noise. Was it merrymaking or quarrelling? Faith! Balloquet must take care of himself; and I went home and to bed.

XV

A VAGABOND

On the day following that night which I had so well employed, I did not wake until after noon. I went over in my mind the events of the preceding evening. When one has done so much and heard so many anecdotes, one may be pardoned for being a little confused.

Madame Sordeville's pretty face very soon presented itself to my memory. Now that I was no longer excited by the illusions of the ballroom and the strains of the music, I tried to determine what sort of woman she was, and whether I could reasonably hope for success if I should make love to her.

She was pretty, well formed, graceful, amiable—yes, and intelligent; at all events, she possessed that sort of wit that gives sparkle to a conversation; I could not say as yet whether it had any substantial foundation. In that respect, women are much more deceitful than men; they are much more skilful in throwing dust in one's eyes. Too often the flow of words and bright sallies is only a sort of froth that will not stand the test of time.

Madame Sordeville was undoubtedly a flirt. It is often said that all women are; but there are gradations. There are the amiable flirts who give a pungent flavor to love; there are others who do not give a lover one moment's peace or rest; and, frankly, a woman who takes pleasure in tormenting one is a sorry acquaintance. But I had not got to that point; perhaps the lady in question

would never be anything to me, albeit her husband seemed to be not at all jealous.

The anecdotes that were told at our dinner the day before recurred to my mind; one of them especially had made a deep impression on me, and I was surprised that I had forgotten for so long a time that young girl of Sceaux—that unhappy Mignonne, toward whom Fouvenard had behaved so abominably. As if it were not enough to abandon her after having made her a mother, he must needs force her, against her will, into another man's arms! That was a perfect outrage! The law punishes men for less than Fouvenard had done—and all because she loved him! Unhappy girl! and to think that she was on the point of becoming a mother! I simply must see her, and try to alleviate her misery. Perhaps she was in utter destitution. He said Rue Ménilmontant, No. 80. I determined to go there; but I hoped that he had lied to us; that his Mignonne did not exist. It would be too execrable, if it were true.

I rang for my servant, and he appeared. He was a simple-minded fellow, but trustworthy, I was confident; and as that is the rarest of qualities in all ranks of society, I kept Pomponne in my service, although he was very often guilty of the most stupid blunders, and was of such a prying, inquisitive turn that I often had to reprove him.

Pomponne gave me all that I required for my toilet; but, as he walked about the room, I noticed that his manner was unusually idiotic, a symptom which always indicated that he had something to say and did not know how to go about it. So that it was necessary for me to give him a lead.

"Have you been making a fool of yourself since yesterday, Pomponne?"

"Me, monsieur! what makes you ask me that? You didn't tell me to, did you?"

"Why, you don't usually wait for my instructions to do that. Are there any letters for me?"

"No, monsieur."

"Did anybody call while I was asleep?"

"Call?"

"Yes, call."

"I don't think so, monsieur."

"You don't think so? Aren't you sure?"

"Oh, yes! I am sure."

"What the devil's the matter with you this morning, that you seem so much more stupid than usual?"

"Why, it seems to me that I'm just the same as usual."

"Come, brush my hair, and be quick about it! It's late."

You must know that Monsieur Pomponne was an excellent hair dresser; that and his trustworthiness, you see, made him rather a notable personage. He had studied the trade of hair dressing for some time; he gave it up, so he told me, because, as he had a fine lot of hair, his head was constantly used for beginners to practice on, and that got to be rather tiresome.

"And the love affairs, Pomponne—how do they come on?"

My servant blushed; he was not an accomplished rake, you see.

"Oh, monsieur! I haven't any love affairs!"

"Ah! so you choose to play the close-mouthed lover with me?—What about the maid-servant of the old gentleman opposite? you haven't made love to her, you rascal, have you?"

"Oh, monsieur! I may have laughed a little with her; just in a joking way, that's all."

"We all know what it means to laugh with maid-servants."

"However, I think I'm going to lose her—poor Mademoiselle Rosalie!"

"Is she sick?"

"No, monsieur; I mean that she's probably going to leave the house. She has discharged her master."

"Discharged her master? You mean that her master has discharged her, of course?"

"No, monsieur; I give you my word that she told me: 'I don't want any more of my master; I've given him his papers.'—And she added: 'I said *zut!* to him.'"

"The deuce! Mademoiselle Rosalie's language is rather décolleté, I should say! Why is she leaving her master? He's rich and a widower—an excellent place for a servant, especially for one who says *zut.*"

"It seems, monsieur, that her master doesn't like to pay her."

"Nonsense! that can't be. My old neighbor is noted for paying promptly and not having any debts."

"I beg pardon, monsieur: they have had a dispute. You see, Mademoiselle Rosalie has a funny custom; she gets a commission for everything."

"I don't understand. Doesn't she get any wages?"

"Yes, monsieur; she has three hundred francs."

"Well?"

"Well, that don't make any difference; when she does an errand—for instance, when her master sends her with a letter to one of his friends, or anywhere else—well, that's fifteen sous; she charges a commission of fifteen sous. When she has to wash the windows, it's twenty sous. When she scrubs, it's twenty-five sous; do you see?"

"Perfectly. So it's just the same as if he hadn't any servant; that's very convenient!"

"She calls that putting the masters where they belong."

"Just try putting me where I belong! I'll discharge you on the instant."

"However, it seems that Rosalie's master never found any fault with all that; but the other night he told her to warm his bed; and when she charged him twelve sous for it the next day, that made him mad. I says to her: 'I must say, mamzelle, it seems to me, you might warm your master's bed for nothing!'—'Well, I guess not!' says she; 'he'd get into the habit of having it done every night!'"

"Peste! there's a servant who will make her way in the world."

"She's making it, monsieur; she tells me that she takes thirty-six francs to the savings bank every month."

"And her wages are only twenty-five! She has the saving instinct, sure!"

While I was talking with Pomponne, I noticed an odor that was not customary in my apartments.

"Pomponne," I said abruptly, "have you been smoking this morning?"

"Smoking, monsieur? You know I never smoke."

"But it smells of tobacco here; not of cigars, but of a pipe, and vile tobacco too."

My servant smiled with an expression which he tried to render cunning, and said in an undertone, leaning over me:

"I know who it is; it's the other one."

"What other one?"

"The man who's waiting out there, in the reception room."

"What! there's someone waiting for me, and you didn't tell me?"

"Oh! he—he said he wasn't in any hurry."

"And you told me that no one had called!"

"He's not a caller. I heard you say once: 'If that person comes here again, and I have company, call me at once; don't let him in.'"

I trembled as I began to realize who the visitor was.

"Can it be——" I faltered.

"Yes, monsieur; it's the party named Ballangier—the one who's so free and easy like, and makes himself so much at home here, just as if he was in his own house."

I felt as if a heavy weight had settled down on my chest. In an instant all my cheerful thoughts had vanished. A feeling of depression replaced them. The presence—the very name—of Ballangier always produced that effect on me.

"Has this—gentleman been here long?"

"About three-quarters of an hour, monsieur, when you rang."

"Didn't you tell him that I had been at a ball, and that I was likely to sleep very late?"

"Yes, monsieur, I said all that. But he just sat down and said: 'That's all the same to me; I've got plenty of time.' And then, he took out a pipe and lighted it. It was no use for me to say: 'You mustn't smoke here; my master don't like the smell.'—He sings out: 'I smoke everywhere! and you can open the windows and burn some *castonnade*.'"

"Show the gentleman in, and leave us. And if anybody should call while he is here, remember, Pomponne, that I am not at home to anyone."

"Yes, monsieur—as usual."

Pomponne went out, and in a moment the person who was waiting entered my bedroom.

Ballangier was thirty-four years old; he looked older, because he had led a riotous life for a long while. Dissipation and debauchery make a man old prematurely.

Imagine a man of more than ordinary height, who would have had a good figure if he had not acquired the habit of stooping. A refined, regular face, aquiline nose, small, heart-shaped mouth, and very black eyes surmounted by heavy eyebrows; an abundance of hair, once black, but now gray. All this would have formed an attractive whole, had it not been spoiled by a pronounced hangdog air. An expression that was impudent when not made stupid by drink, and manners that were often brutal; in addition, clothes that were always soiled and often in tatters, and the gait of a drummer; this rough sketch may serve to convey an impression of the person who stood before me.

On the present occasion he wore a brown frock-coat that was neither ripped nor torn. It lacked only two buttons in front, but it was covered with spots and stains. His black trousers were shockingly muddy, as were his boots. As for his linen, that was invisible. A frayed black stock encircled his neck, and he held in his hand a round black hat which seemed to have had many hard knocks.

When he entered my bedroom, Ballangier removed his pipe from his mouth. He walked forward, swaying his hips, nodded to me with a smile, and stretched himself out in an easy-chair, saying:

"Here I am! How goes it, Charles?"

"Very well, thanks."

"It seems that you had a bit of a spree last night, and you've had a good snooze this morning. You do right

to enjoy yourself. It's such good fun to spree it! I'd like to do nothing else, myself."

"I should say that you had done little else thus far."

"Bah! bagatelles! To make things hum, a fellow must have the needful. Everything's so dear to-day! Those villains of wine merchants and restaurant keepers won't give credit any more!"

"They are wise."

"Why are they wise?"

"Because you have run up bills more than once that would never have been paid if I hadn't paid them."

"Who says I wouldn't have paid my debts? But a fellow must have time! Why are they in such a hurry?"

"You make me blush for you, Ballangier! Am I the person for you to make such speeches to?"

"Well, what's the matter now? Ain't I to be allowed to speak?"

"You might at least save yourself the trouble of lying to me, who know you too well! and who know what your conduct has always been! When a man who has no income desires to meet his obligations, he says to himself: 'I'll work and earn money.'—For, as I have told you a hundred times, there's no other way to obtain an honorable position in the world. You refuse to understand that everybody on this earth has to work, from the smallest to the greatest, from the humblest clerk to the highest functionary, from the artisan to the artist. The very rich men whose lot you envy—for the idle and lazy, the people who do nothing, naturally envy the lot of the rich—those who have great wealth have to busy themselves with investing it, managing their property, overlooking the conduct of the people they employ, regulating their expenses; and if they wish to retain their

fortune, I assure you they don't pass their whole life enjoying themselves."

Ballangier lay back in his chair, shook the ashes out of his pipe, and looked at me with a bantering air, as he rejoined:

"What work have you, who preach so eloquently, ever done? What is your employment? I don't know what it is, but I don't think it's very wearisome."

I could not restrain an indignant gesture, for the man's ingratitude was revolting to me; he owed everything to me! But I soon grew calm again; there was one thought before which my anger vanished, and I replied quietly:

"In the first place, I was justified in not taking up any profession, as my father left me fifteen thousand francs a year."

"I don't say that you did wrong; I am not blaming you, my dear fellow, but, that being the case, I wasn't so far out of the way, was I?"

"I beg your pardon. Be good enough to listen to me. Although I had some fortune, I began at once to study law, in order to become an advocate. Some time after, having a passion for the arts, I studied music, painting, and sculpture, in turn; then I turned to poetry, I wrote a poem—a bad one, perhaps, but I devoted my best energies to it, none the less. So you see that I have done something; and if I should lose now what money I still have, I could make a living honestly, and without assistance, with the small talents I have acquired. Can you say as much, you who have nothing, no future prospects, but have never been willing to do anything or to learn anything? who, instead of remaining in the sphere in which you were born, have plunged into a vice-ridden

circle, and acquired the tastes and habits and manners of people who are cast out from all respectable society?"

"What's that? what's that? I'm a cabinetmaker! Isn't that a respectable trade? Anyone would think, to hear you, that I worked nights—on the dust heaps!"

"Oh! I don't despise any trade, monsieur. I esteem every man whose behavior is honorable. The mechanic, the artisan, the day laborer, are all entitled to my esteem and consideration when they are honest and upright. I say again, there is no despicable trade; the vicious, lazy, idle people, the drunken debauchees, no matter to what rank in life they belong, are the ones whom we should look upon with contempt and shame. You claim to be a mechanic, but you lie. You are nothing, neither cabinetmaker nor anything else, because you will not do anything, because work is a burden and a bore to you, because you have acquired the habit of passing your time in wine shops and dance halls, or in vile dens of debauchery, where you have associated yourself with wretches who are the offscourings of society! And at thirty-four years of age, you continue this line of conduct! Ah! you are incorrigible; that is evident!"

Ballangier threw his pipe on the floor, exclaiming angrily:

"Damnation! I'm sick of this sort of thing! If I am incorrigible, I don't quite see why you preach this sermon at me!"

"I am entitled to do it; if you had followed my advice, listened to my entreaties, you would not be where I find you now. Furthermore, if my sermons displease you, why do you come here? I told you not to. Do I not send you regularly every three months the allowance that I have consented to make you, although, as you

well know, I am under no obligation to do it? Only a fortnight ago, I went myself and handed your quarterly payment to your concierge."

"That's just what I don't want you to do! He kept half of it, the miserly old screw!"

"Kept it! You told me yourself that he was an honest man; and you say that he kept money belonging to you!"

"He claimed that I owed him for loans, and food, and carrying letters—mere trifles!"

"If you owed him, you should pay him."

"I'd have paid him later; he had no right to pay himself. Oh! I know the law, don't I? You ought to know about it, as you studied to be an advocate."

"What do you want to-day? Why did you come here?"

"I wanted to tell you that I am going to move! I can't stay in a house where the concierge has no sense of delicacy. By the way, you haven't a glass of anything to give me, have you? I came out without my breakfast this morning; I've done a good deal of running around, and it makes a man hollow. Come, Charlot, be a good fellow! Don't scowl at Fanfinet! You know that I'm a good friend."

I made no reply, but opened a cupboard containing several bottles of different liqueurs. I took out one of them and a small glass, and placed them in front of Ballangier; who instantly pounced on the bottle and filled the glass to the brim, saying:

"Won't you drink with me?"

"No; I never drink liqueur in the morning."

"As you please; there's no accounting for tastes. You are very delicate, you are; for my part, I'd drink a goblet

of rum without winking. This is anisette—a lady's cordial! sweet as sugar! Never mind, it's not bad."

"What are you doing now, Ballangier? Are you working anywhere? Come, tell me frankly."

"I'm going to tell you just how it is. As if I could conceal anything from you! I always pour out my troubles on your breast."

"Why did you come here to-day?"

"I'll tell you all about it. But haven't you something a little stiffer to give me? Your anisette makes me sick at my stomach. Tell me where it is; don't disturb yourself."

"I have nothing else to give you; moreover, I don't choose to give you anything else. If I listened to you, you would drink yourself drunk here. It's quite enough that you should take the liberty to smoke; you know perfectly well that I don't like it."

"People smoke in the most select society."

"Enough of this, monsieur! Why did you come here in spite of my prohibition?"

"Oh! monsieur—what a tone! We seem to be in an infernal humor to-day, monseigneur! Luckily, I'm not easily frightened."

I strove to keep down my irritation; I stood in front of my mirror and arranged my cravat, then finished dressing myself. Ballangier, seeing that I paid no heed to him, poured out another glass of anisette; then, trying to assume a piteous tone, he mumbled:

"I know well enough that I don't amount to much, that I've often done foolish things. That's true; but, after all, youth must have its fling; mine seems to last a good while, but whose fault is it? And it's no time to treat me like a dog, just when I've made up my mind

to turn over a new leaf, to straighten myself out and be sensible!"

He paused and glanced at me; but I did not say a word, and he continued:

"Yes, this time, I have reflected seriously. As you said just now, I am no longer young, I must think of my future; and an opportunity is offered me—an affair that would suit me to a T. I have spoken to you about Morillot—a good fellow, who's in the cabinetmaking line; he's no ne'er-do-well, but a worker; and I confess that if I'd listened to him, I'd be in better case than I am. Well, Morillot has gone back to Besançon, where he came from. He always said to me: 'When I have a place for you, I'll write and you can come.'—Well, he's just written to me, and he says that, if I choose to come, he's got just what I want; and that, if I behave myself, I'll soon be able to set up for myself at Besançon. I came here to tell you that."

I listened to Ballangier without interrupting him. I did not know whether I ought to believe him, he had deceived me so often! It was no easy matter to read his face; he could assume any expression he chose; he could even weep, when he thought that would advance his schemes.

"If this Morillot has really made you such a proposition, why don't you go?" I asked at last.

"Ah! you're a good one, you are! That's easy enough to say. But I don't want to go to Besançon dressed like this—all in rags; that would give people a bad opinion of me at the outset. If a man's hide isn't somewhere near decent—you know what fools folks are! And then the journey; and then, I shan't get paid as soon as I arrive. In fact, I haven't a sou, as that rascally concierge kept

almost the whole of what you gave him for me. And, anyway, fifty francs a month ain't a fortune! A man can't go far with that!"

"A man can live with that; and if you chose to work, you could have everything you need. How many poor women who pass their days sewing, and sit up half the night to add a few sous to their day's pay, don't earn as much as this sum that seems to you too small! But do you forget all that I have done for you? I have tried every possible means of bringing you back to a respectable mode of life. The more money I give you, the more you spend in those dens of iniquity where you pass your life. I got tired at last of supporting your vices; and I still do too much for you."

"Come! come! let's not get excited! It's not worth while to talk about the past. What's gone by is wiped out. To-day, to replenish my wardrobe, to pay for my journey and incidental expenses, and to keep me till I get paid for my work, I need—*dame!* I need fully four hundred francs. Oh! I know it's like pulling out a tooth, and that I've cost you a lot of money already; but this will be the last time; and you wont hear of me again. I'll settle at Besançon; they say Franche-Comté is a pleasant country; at all events, I can be happy anywhere."

I reflected, while Ballangier watched me with something very like anxiety. He had lied to me so often that I dared not put faith in what he said.

"What have you to prove the truth of what you tell me?"

"Oh! I suspected that you wouldn't believe me; but I have my proofs."

And Ballangier, feeling in his pocket, triumphantly produced a letter, which he handed to me. It came from

Besançon, it was signed *Morillot*, and it did, in fact, contain what he had said. I had already given him money; but if I could finally rid myself of him and of the fear of meeting him in Paris—— That hope put an end to my hesitation.

I opened my secretary, took out four hundred francs in gold, and placed the money in Ballangier's hand.

"Take it," I said; "and may you at last make a good use of what I give you!"

Ballangier turned purple with pleasure when he held the gold pieces in his hand; he made as if he would throw himself on my neck; but I stepped back and he checked himself, crying:

"That is true, I am not worthy; but I will wait till another time. I propose to become a model of virtue. Sacrebleu! I propose that you shall be satisfied with me at last! I will make it a point of honor! Au revoir, Charlot!—no, I mean adieu! you prefer that, and you're quite right."

He said no more, but walked quickly from the room. And I breathed more freely when he was no longer there.

XVI

MADAME LANDERNOY

I felt the need of some distraction to enable me to forget the visit I had just received.

"Ah!" I thought; "I will go and hunt up the poor girl from Sceaux."

I had finished dressing. Pomponne, seeing that I was preparing to go out, planted himself in front of me, like a soldier awaiting the countersign, and said:

"Is monsieur going out?"

"As you see."

"Monsieur has no orders for me?"

"None."

"Will monsieur return to dinner?"

"Come, come, Pomponne! are you going crazy altogether?"

"I don't think so, monsieur."

"Then why do you ask me that question? You know perfectly well that I usually dine at a table d'hôte, and never at home."

"True, monsieur; but you do sometimes dine at home, when you have company, you know.—Ha! ha!"

Monsieur Pomponne felt called upon to laugh slyly and assume a mischievous look; for you must know that I dine at home only when I am entertaining a lady who fears to compromise her reputation by going to a restaurant. There are ladies who decline to go to restaurants, but are perfectly willing to go to a gentleman's apartment. I am far from blaming them; everyone is free

to act as she pleases. But it was a long time since I had entertained in my own quarters, my recent acquaintances having had no dislike for restaurants. So I simply informed Pomponne that he was a zany, and left the house.

From Rue Bleue, where I lived, to Rue Ménilmontant is a long distance, but the fresh air and the exercise did me good. I thought of my charming partner, the seductive Armantine's image was constantly before my eyes; and when I spied a woman of her stature and figure, I quickened my pace, in order to overtake her and find out if it were she. I always had my trouble for my pains, which did not deter me from doing the same thing again a few moments later. I have noticed that love always gives as much occupation to the legs as to the mind.

My amorous thoughts cooled a little as I drew near Rue Ménilmontant, a street, by the way, which might well pass for a faubourg. In that quarter I met no more women who reminded me of Armantine. I called her "Armantine" to myself, although that was perhaps a slightly familiar way of speaking of a woman I had known less than twenty-four hours, and who had given me no right to claim that privilege. But when a lover is speaking to himself, is he not at liberty to apply the fondest names to the object of his adoration, and to address her by the most familiar terms, in the ecstasy of his illusions? That injures nobody and affords him so much pleasure! It has often been said, and justly, that: "Men are overgrown children, who must always have some plaything to fondle. With some it is ambition, honors; with others, wealth; with others, peace and repose; but with the vast majority, love."—To these last,

the image of the loved one is the persistent idea that guides all their actions.

The number mentioned by Fouvenard was a long way up the street. I was not very far from the barrier, and it was easy to imagine one's self in the country. I presumed that lodgings thereabout were not very dear. At last I found the number I sought. It was a house of great height. As I entered, I began to wonder what I should say to that young woman, whom I had never seen, and what pretext I should allege for my visit. The first step was to find if she really lived there. I found a concierge, almost entirely hidden by two cats and a dog that had established themselves upon her person and covered her face so that only the end of her nose was visible. I asked for Mademoiselle Mignonne.

The concierge managed to push her way through the cats, and responded:

"Mademoiselle Mignonne? Don't know her."

"You don't know her?"

"Faith, no! What does she do?"

"What does she do? Why, she works; sews or embroiders, I believe."

"No such person in the house, monsieur."

So Fouvenard had deceived us; his Mignonne was a creation of his fancy. I was sure of it! I much preferred to find out that he had lied to us, rather than that that poor girl really existed. I had already left the house; but a few steps away, I stopped; I remembered that the girl had a family name also; perhaps she had hired a lodging in Paris under that name. So I retraced my steps to where the concierge sat amid her animals, and said:

"The person I am looking for is named Landernoy; Mignonne is her Christian name."

"Oh! Landernoy—that's a different matter; if you had asked for that name first, you wouldn't have had the trouble of coming back."

"You know her, then?"

"*Pardi!* to be sure I do, as she lives in the house. Mamzelle Landernoy—Madame, I mean, for we call her *madame* now, you see; it's properer, considering her condition. I don't know whether you know what I mean?"

"Yes, yes, perfectly; of course, I ought to have said *madame*."

"Oh! as to that, we know well enough that the only marriage she ever had was at the mayor's office of the thirteenth arrondissement! But then, what can you expect? she's one more poor girl that's made a misstep; but that's no reason for heaving stones at her. The good Lord said we mustn't heave stones at anybody—especially at poor women who've been weak; eh, monsieur?"

The concierge's words led me to forgive her her cats, and I would gladly have shaken hands with her if I had not been afraid of being clawed.

"Madame," I said, "your sentiments do you honor."

"*Dame!* I say what I think, that's all. And then, the poor thing seems so unhappy! It ain't that she complains the least bit—oh, no! she's proud enough in her poverty! But, in the first place, she can't be happy, because her seducer's gone back on her altogether; that is, I suppose he has; for nobody ever comes to see her now, not even a cat—except mine; they sometimes go and bid her good-day. And then, when she came here, she had a modest little room on the fifth; and now she's left that and taken another one right up under the eaves, with a little round window and no fireplace. In fact, you can hardly call it a room; it's only a closet at best. But,

dame! it only costs seventy francs a year, and the other room was almost twice that; and when you haven't got anything but your work to live on—and a woman earns so little—and on the point of being a mother, too!—Still, it don't make any difference; as I was just saying, she don't complain. She's making clothes for the baby; and when I go in to say good-day to her, she always shows me a little cap or a little shirt, and says:

"'Look—this is for him!'—And then she smiles. Poor soul! she never smiles, only when she speaks of her child."

"But what does the poor girl live on, in heaven's name?"

"Oh! she works, she makes linen garments; she sews mighty well; and then, she's got a pretty taste for trimming caps and headdresses; I'm sure she could have kept her first room, if she'd wanted to; but I suppose that she said to herself that, as she was going to be a mother, she must be saving and put a little something aside against the time when the child comes. And, as I tell you, she's making him a pretty little outfit; I'm sure that there's a dozen little caps already."

I was deeply moved by what I had heard. The concierge pointed out the staircase leading to Mignonne's lodging, but, as she did so, she said to me:

"Have you come to give the poor woman an order for some work?"

"Yes, that is my purpose."

"This is what I was going to say, monsieur: since her—lover stopped coming to see her—a fellow with a big beard that I didn't call very good-looking—Madame Landernoy—we call her *madame*, you know—has got to be sort of wild like; you would say she was afraid. She

says to me: 'If any gentlemen come to speak to me, please to say always that I ain't in, that I've gone out; don't let 'em come up.'—As there hasn't been one come for a long while, I ain't had to say anything, but I just this minute thought of her orders. However, if you mean to give her work, that can't disturb her."

"Never fear, madame; my only desire is to try to be useful to your interesting tenant, not to distress her in any way."

"All right, then; go up—way up to the top, as long as you find stairs; then the door facing you. There's nobody but Madame Landernoy up there in the daytime, anyway; the other two rooms belong to servants, who never go up till bed time."

I understood why the poor girl did not wish to receive visits from men. After the plot of which she had been the victim, she must naturally have retained a feeling of aversion for them and must look upon them all with suspicion. In that case, I should not be warmly received, and what was I to say? I had no idea; but, no matter! I was determined to see Mignonne, and even to face her wrath.

I ascended the stairs, the first flights being broad and roomy, but the upper ones very narrow. On the fifth floor I paused to take breath; in front of me was a sort of ladder, the only means of access to the lofts which many landlords have the assurance to call rooms. I know that Béranger said:

"How happy one is in a garret at twenty!"

True, when one is there to make love! but it must be a miserable sojourn when love abandons one there!

I climbed the ladder and found myself in a low, narrow, dark passageway; I distinguished a door in front of me;

that was where she lived. My heart beat as if I were on the point of committing some evil deed. Why are we no less excited when about to do good than when about to do evil? I like to believe that the sensation is different.

I approached the door, and was on the point of knocking, when I heard a voice. I listened.

"Yes, you will be warmly wrapped in this, dear child! Another little nightgown; that makes six. Ah! you see, I don't want you to lack anything; you will be my companion, my little companion; you will never leave me, and I shan't be alone any more, then; I shall be very happy; I'll kiss you as much as I choose, all day long, for I shall be the one to nurse you! Some people look as if they pitied me because I am going to be a mother! Ah! they don't understand all the joys and hopes that go with that title! Why, if it wasn't for my child, I should be dead! Oh, yes! I should have preferred to die! If it's a girl, I shall call her Marie; that was my mother's name. If it's a boy, I shall call him—I—I don't know yet. Édouard's a nice name, or Léon. But not Ernest, in any case! Ah! what a horrible name!"

These last words were uttered in a trembling voice, and I heard nothing more. I knocked gently on the door.

"Who's there? Is it you, Madame Potrelle? Wait a minute, and I'll let you in."

The door opened. It was, in truth, Mignonne, as Fouvenard had described her to us: a pale, fair-haired girl, with soft, blue eyes; but the lips were no longer red, or the complexion rosy; grief and lonely vigils, during an advanced stage of pregnancy, had seamed and emaciated that youthful face, whose habitual expression now was one of melancholy.

Mignonne stood as if struck dumb with amazement at sight of me. I removed my hat and bowed respectfully; I was desirous to inspire her with confidence; but as I did not know what to say, and as she seemed to be waiting for me to speak, we stood for several minutes, looking at each other, without a word.

"Monsieur—you have mistaken the room, I think," faltered Mignonne at last, in an uncertain voice. "You did not mean to come to my room; you came up too high."

"No, mademoi—no, madame; I think that I have not made a mistake. I am looking for Madame Landernoy; are not you she?"

"Yes, monsieur, that is my name. What do you want of me?"

Mignonne spoke in a short, sharp tone, which proved that my visit was not agreeable to her. I was still at the door, and she did not ask me to come in. Perhaps she did not wish me to see the wretched place she lived in, and, in truth, what I did see made my heart bleed, for, without entering, the whole room was visible. It was a tiny room, with no light except from a round hole in the sloping roof, the window being opened or closed by an iron bar, as it was so high as to be out of reach. So that she had no sight of anything but a little patch of sky when she raised her eyes to look out. There was no fireplace, but a small air-tight stove. A bed, a commode, a table, a small buffet, a water pail, and six chairs composed the poor girl's furniture. But everything was neatly arranged and spotlessly clean.

Evidently, in my inspection of the room, I forgot to answer the question she asked me, for it was repeated in a still more imperative tone:

"I asked you what you wanted, monsieur; for I don't know you."

"Oh! I beg pardon, madame! I came to ask you—I am told that you do very fine linen work, and I wanted—I had some work to give you to do, if you chose to undertake it."

"Who told you that I did linen work, monsieur?"

"Why—a lady—for whom you have worked."

"What is the lady's name?"

I was sadly embarrassed. I stammered and stuttered, and finally replied:

"Faith! I really don't remember. The lady told another lady, a friend of hers, who told me, because she knew I wanted some shirts made."

"I am not very skilful, monsieur; and the person I work for must not be very exacting."

"Oh! I am not at all exacting, madame; I want some shirts—to wear in the country. If you had the simplest kind of a pattern to show me."

I took several steps forward; Mignonne allowed me to enter her garret; she seemed to have laid aside her distrust. I was conscious of a secret joy, and, while she was looking in a drawer, I took a chair, saying:

"Excuse me, madame, if I sit down; but I came up rather rapidly, and the stairs are quite steep."

"Pray rest, monsieur; I should have offered you a seat; but my room is not very cheerful, and it never occurs to me to do the honors. Dear me! I can't find any pattern. I remember now that the day before yesterday I returned the last shirts I had to make. But you have brought me a pattern, no doubt?"

"No; I did not think of it."

"But it is absolutely necessary."

"I will bring you one, then."

"If you will kindly hand it to the lady who gave you my address, monsieur, with the linen for the shirts, I will go there and get them; for, of course, you would not bring the package here yourself."

She was determined to find out who had given me her address. In my earnest desire to obtain her confidence, I said:

"Oh! I thought that you would probably undertake to buy it yourself—the linen, or percale, or Scotch batiste, or what you will; for I don't know anything about it; ladies are better at buying such things than we are. I can bring you a pattèrn; I will roll it up and put it in my pocket, and you won't need to put yourself out. In view of your condition, madame, you should avoid fatigue as much as possible."

"But, monsieur, if I go out to buy linen, it won't be any extra trouble to call on the lady; and I can thank her at the same time for thinking about me."

"Oh! that is natural enough! She knew that you could—that you had more claim than most women to her interest. She said to me: 'Mademoiselle Mignonne—that is to say, Madame Landernoy—deserves your full confidence, and I commend her to you.'"

The moment that I mentioned the name of Mignonne, she sprang to her feet from the chair she had taken; her brow clouded, she fixed her eyes on the floor, trembling convulsively, and murmured:

"Who told you, monsièur, that my name was Mignonne? None of the people I have worked for have known me by any other name than that of Madame Landernoy."

"Mon Dieu! I can't remember now, madame. But someone must have told me. That lady probably learned it by accident."

ROCHEBRUNE VISITS MIGNONNE

Mignonne stood as if struck dumb with amazement at sight of me. I removed my hat and bowed respectfully; I was desirous to inspire her with confidence; but as I did not know what to say, and as she seemed to be waiting for me to speak, we stood for several minutes, looking at each other, without a word.

Mignonne made a slight movement of her shoulders, which I could not interpret as flattering to me. To be sure, for the last minute I had been stumbling and splashing about, with no idea of what I was saying. I saw that I had made an egregious blunder by calling her Mignonne. Of course, her Christian name was not generally known; and, as I knew it, she thought, no doubt, that I was a friend of the man who had so shamelessly betrayed her; perhaps she imagined that Fouvenard had sent me to her. That idea drove me to despair. A fine thing I had done, parbleu! How was I to regain her confidence?

I took two hundred francs from my pocket and handed them to her, saying:

"Here is some money to buy linen with, madame, if you will kindly attend to it. If it is not enough, please let me know——"

Mignonne refused to take the money, saying in a severe tone:

"It's not worth while for you to give me this money, monsieur; I am not in the habit of buying materials myself. Besides, I cannot, at this moment, undertake the work you offer me. I haven't time to do it; I have other work that is more urgent."

I sadly put the money back in my pocket, mumbling:

"But I'm not in any hurry for the shirts, madame; you may make them when you choose."

"No, monsieur; I don't accept work unless I have time to do it.—Adieu, monsieur!"

She had thrown her door wide open, and she stood at one side, apparently inviting me to go. She dismissed me, she was anxious to see the last of me. Clearly, to remain any longer would simply have irritated her more. I rose and bowed low, but I paused in the doorway to say to her:

"I venture to hope, madame, that I shall be more fortunate another time, and that you will then consent to work for me."

"Yes, monsieur, another time."

And she closed her door almost in my face. I was incensed against myself. If I had not called her Mignonne, she would have undertaken the work I offered her. Now she looked upon me with suspicion, with horror perhaps, thinking that I was a friend of Fouvenard, and remembering why he sent his friends to her and how they treated her.

I was convinced that she would forbid her concierge to allow me to go up to her room. I had guessed that by her manner when she said:

"Yes, monsieur, another time."

So I was dismissed, turned out of doors, by that girl whom I had visited with none but the purest and most honorable purposes! To be useful to her, to relieve her distress, to avenge her if possible for the outrages of which she had been the victim—that was my object in going to see her; and although the girl was pretty enough, never, not even since I had been in a position to judge of her beauty, had any ulterior purpose suggested itself to my mind. It seemed to me that Mignonne could be to me nothing more than a friend, a sister; no other thought had come to my mind or my heart.

However, I determined to be of some use to her, no matter what she might do; and when I have determined on a thing, I am not to be deterred by obstacles.

I hastened down the stairs, and passed the concierge and her cats without stopping. I walked very fast until I found a cab, which I entered, and was driven to a shop where they sold linens, batistes—in a word, stuff for shirts.

I chose the first thing they showed me—Scotch batiste, I believe—and took enough to make a dozen shirts. Then I returned to my cab and went home, for I remembered that I must have a pattern. I took one of my shirts that seemed to be made in the simplest way, and was about to start off again, when it occurred to me that if, as I feared, she should refuse to see me, I had best leave a letter; so I concluded to write a few lines, and sign my name, in order to regain her confidence; when a man is not afraid to give his name, it is usually a proof that he has no evil designs.

I sat down at my desk and wrote:

"MADAME:

"Although you refused the work I offered you, I take the liberty of sending it to you. You can do it at odd moments; do not let it put you out in the least. If I have been unfortunate enough, madame, to arouse your distrust, and if you do not choose to receive me again, you may hand the work to your concierge when it is done, with a memorandum of what I owe you; and I will pay her. But I beg you to believe, madame, that I was led to call upon you solely by the interest that you cannot fail to arouse in all honorable persons, and that my motive is one that can be unhesitatingly avowed.

"CHARLES ROCHEBRUNE."

I closed the letter, took my cab once more, and returned to Mignonne's abode.

All this going and coming had taken some time. When I stopped in front of the house the second time, it was nearly two hours since I had left it. I went at once to the concierge, with my bundle of linen under my arm.

Before I had mentioned the girl's name, the concierge cried:

"She ain't in, monsieur; that young lady's gone out; you can't go up. In fact, she don't want you to go up to her room any more; she scolded me for letting you go."

"I thought that you might have received that order, madame, and I do not insist on seeing Madame Landernoy; but here is a letter for her, and a package, which I beg you to be good enough to hand her."

"A package! I don't know if I ought to take it."

"You cannot refuse to receive it, madame. Besides, I assure you that my intentions are honorable, and that young woman does very wrong to distrust me. I hope that she will do me justice later. I will return in about a fortnight."

With that, I tossed letter and bundle on the concierge's knees, at the risk of crushing one of her cats, and turned away, paying no heed to her reply.

XVII

MADAME SORDEVILLE AND HER RECEPTION

I had done all that I could, all that it was possible for me to do at that moment for Mignonne; and I felt better satisfied with myself. I determined to forget her for a while and think of my new love.

I made up my mind to go to Monsieur Sordeville's on Thursday. I must wait until then to see the charming Armantine. The intervening four days seemed very long. There are some men who kill time and shorten the period

of separation by talking of their loved one with their friends; but I have never had confidants; true love is always better placed in the depths of our hearts than in the memory of indifferent persons, who take no interest in it, or recall it only to laugh at us if we are betrayed, to call us fools if we are loyal, to envy us if we are happy. Moreover, is it true that we have any real friends? For my own part, I know of none. In my youth, I believed in the friendship of some young men with whom I was often thrown in parties of pleasure; at that time, overflowing with confidence, I asked nothing better than to lay bare my heart, to devote myself in all sincerity to those who pressed my hand; but I was very ill repaid for my frankness and my kindliness. My delusions were destroyed too soon, and I held aloof from men and drew nearer to women; I have never repented of it, for in friendship women are infinitely superior to men.

I do not call those people my friends whom I meet by chance at parties or dinners, like Balloquet and Dupréval; they are acquaintances, nothing more.

Thursday arrived, and I betook myself to Monsieur Sordeville's, on Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin: a handsome house, handsome hall, handsome apartments; a servant to announce the guests; all the externals which indicate opulence. I entered a very spacious salon, in which there were already many people, and passed rapidly through a throng of unfamiliar faces. Monsieur Sordeville left a group of men, with whom he was talking, to come to meet me and shake hands as if we were old friends. I could not help laughing inwardly at the prodigious expenditure of handshakings in society, among people who know one another as little as Monsieur Sordeville and myself, and often are not at all fond of one another. 'Tis

a pity; it would be so pleasant to have one's hand shaken, if it were to be depended upon as an assurance of affection and good will. But men have spoiled everything, and the most expressive words and gestures mean nothing now, because they have been so abused.

Monsieur Sordeville, still holding my hand and pressing it, took me to his wife.

"My dear," he said, "here is Monsieur Rochebrune, who has been good enough to accept our invitation."

The charming Armantine wore a fascinating gown, with infinite grace and coquetry. I did not recognize in her the unconstraint of my partner at Mademoiselle Guillardin's wedding party,—to-day she was a true *petite-maîtresse*, a little affected, and a little ceremonious too. But she was a very seductive woman still. Moreover, it was natural enough that in her own house she should be more punctilious in her manners than at a wedding ball. Doubtless it seemed to her becoming to assume a more dignified bearing to receive her guests; a hostess is a different person from a guest at a party, who has not to play a leading part.

It was too bad! she was so attractive at the ball! she laughed so readily, and seemed to invite one to laugh with her. However, she did the honors of her salon very gracefully; she welcomed me with an affable smile, and thanked me as her husband had done for remembering their invitation. I cannot say what answer I made; my eyes must have said more than my mouth. I tried to detect in her eyes an expression that would at least tell me that she understood me, that she guessed my meaning; but I saw only that gracious smile with which she received the homage of all the men who came up to salute her.

A person is always awkward and embarrassed in a company to which he is an entire stranger, and where he can find no familiar face. I walked away from Madame Sordeville, as it was impossible for me to stand staring at her; that would have made me look like a fool, and would not have advanced my interests at all. With women whom one is anxious to please, one should, above all things, avoid looking like a fool; to be sure, that does not always depend on one's self.

I looked about for Madame Dauberny; I looked forward to meeting her there, because she had seemed to me to be very intimate with the mistress of the house. I did not see her. Men were in a large majority; why were there so few women, and, above all, so few pretty ones? Was it intentional on the part of the hostess? Surely she was pretty enough to fear no rivalry!

The guests were chatting together in groups in different parts of the salon. There was a piano, but thus far there had been no suggestion of music. I walked into another room, where two whist tables were in operation. There were fewer people there. If she should come into that room, I could talk more freely with her. But she was too busily engaged in receiving her guests and listening to the compliments they paid her; she seemed to me to be a great flirt. It has frequently been said that all women are—the desire to please is so natural! As if men were not flirts, too! Everybody wishes to produce an impression: the ugly man seeks to please by his wit; this one by his magnificence, another by his generosity, another by his attentions, his servility, his flatteries; but the end is always the same. So, let us not blame women for being coquettish; nature, when endowing them with beauty, grace, and charm, seems to have taught them

what use they could make of these advantages. But the one person that I cannot endure is a capricious woman; is there anything more insufferable than to be greeted coldly or sulkily, when you do not know the reason and have done nothing to deserve it? Certainly I had no right to complain of Madame Sordeville; still, after her friendly treatment of me at the wedding party, after the sort of intimacy which the disclosure of my secret had at once established between us, I had flattered myself that she would receive me less ceremoniously. But I must wait and see.

Monsieur Sordeville came to me and asked me if I cared for whist.

"I like all games," I replied.

An old gentleman, who closed his eyes when he spoke, as if he were going to sleep, joined us; I had no idea what he said, for the fascinating Armantine entered the room where we were, and I followed her with my eyes. A handsome young man with light hair was walking behind her, talking to her in an undertone—at least, so it seemed to me; the pretty creature laughed heartily, with divers little gestures and expressions that would have brought a regiment to terms. I was annoyed; it was unreasonable of me, perhaps, but I could not bear to have her listen so to that fellow; I was strongly tempted to join in their conversation. But it was impossible; the man who talked with his eyes closed was telling me things that must have been very interesting, judging from the way he emphasized every syllable. Mon Dieu! what tiresome people there are in the world! But, among the various species, the most insufferable, in my opinion, is the man who never stops talking, who joins the story he tells you on to another one, which in turn becomes

entangled in a third, after the style of the *Thousand and One Nights;* so that he is quite capable of keeping you a whole evening in a corner of the salon, without ever giving you a chance of escape, unless you decide boldly to break away from him in the middle of one of his tales.

I have no idea how my conversation with those two gentlemen veered around to politics, of which I have a perfect horror. I discovered to my surprise that Monsieur Sordeville was in government employ and already hinted at opposition. But it did not interest me. I was tempted to close my eyes, like the old gentleman; then I should be more at liberty to think of something else. Luckily, someone began to play on the piano, and gave me an excuse for leaving my politicians.

I returned to the salon, and approached the mistress of the house, intending to say something agreeable to her. But I did not know how to begin the conversation, and I finally asked her if she were going to sing.

"No, I don't sing; but I am ready to play an accompaniment, if anybody wants me to."

"Do you play the piano?"

"Yes, monsieur; and you?"

"A little."

"Do you sing?"

"Only at home, when I am alone."

"Ha! ha! that's selfishness."

"Prudence, rather."

"Surely you will depart from your habit this evening, and sing in company?"

"Oh, no! I should not dare to, before you."

"Why so? do I frighten you?"

"You do something very different."

She smiled, as she smiled at the ball. Ah! how sweet she was at that moment!

But somebody spoke to her, and I was separated from her again. Someone was going to sing, and silence was requested; I took a seat behind two consummately ugly women, who would not distract my thoughts.

The singer was a man, a stout, square-shouldered young man, who struck an attitude like Monsieur Keller as Hercules. I expected a voice that would make our ears ring and the windows rattle; surely nothing different could come from that colossus. In truth, at the first note everybody shuddered. What a voice! indeed, I doubt if it could be called a voice. For my part, I could think of nothing but the roaring of a bull. But there were some people who thought it magnificent. He sang an aria from *Robert le Diable*. The two ladies in front of me emitted *ohs!* and *ahs!* which led me to believe that they agreed with me and that the performance deafened them; especially as the singer, not content with bursting our ear drums, was almost invariably off the pitch; he sang false with imperturbable assurance. There were moments when he put forth such a volume of voice that I wondered if people passing through the street would not think that a crime was being committed in the house.

At last the performance came to an end. The two ladies turned toward me with smiling faces, and I could not help saying:

"I prefer an orchestra with four drums. I don't know yet whether I have any ears left; I believe they are split."

The words were hardly out of my mouth, when the bulky singer walked across the salon and halted directly in front of the two ladies.

"I am not in good voice this evening," he said; "it seemed as if my notes wouldn't come out. What did you think, mother?"

"Why, my dear, you sang beautifully, I assure you."

"Yes, brother; you sang very well, and you made a great impression. You can depend on us; we know what we are talking about, you see. There are people who set up for judges of music, but who don't understand the first thing about it. So much the worse for them! You sang with perfect taste, and I am sure that you made many people envious of you!"

I had addressed my criticisms judiciously! the ladies in front of me were the singer's mother and sister! So the *ohs!* and *ahs!* indicated admiration, and I must needs tell them that I preferred to listen to drums! An additional proof that we should be careful what we say when we do not know the person to whom we are speaking.

I saw that the singer's sister was casting withering glances in my direction, so I decided to walk away and take up my position on the other side of the salon. I had made two enemies; another time I would be more prudent.

After the roaring of our friend, the audience required something soft to soothe its auditory nerves. A lady seated herself at the piano and sang an air with an abundance of trills and roulades. What a misfortune to think of singing in public when one has a shrill, squeaky voice! But I determined to make no comments this time, or express an opinion in any form of words. A young man behind me was not so scrupulous.

"They call that singing with a lemon on the key-board," he muttered.

"If this sort of thing goes on," I thought, "it certainly can't be for the music that people come to Monsieur Sordeville's."

But the hostess made us some amends by executing with much dash and brilliancy a theme with variations which had the merit of not being too long. Next, the fair-haired youth whom I had seen talking with Armantine sang several ballads. He had a pleasant voice and sang with good taste. That added to my vexation, for I was convinced that he was paying court to her. But I did him the justice to admit that he sang well.

While a duet for piano and violin was being performed, I went into another room; I confess that I was not enjoying myself. The hostess was so surrounded by courtiers and adorers that it was impossible to talk with her an instant. Indeed, she made no effort to give me an opportunity. Ah! how different from the night of the wedding ball! There were times when I fancied that she was not the same woman.

I sat down at a baccarat table which had just been made up. I was well pleased to play cards, for I have always considered it the best of all ways to entertain people in society.

I had been playing for some little time, when, happening to turn my head, I saw Madame Frédérique. Never did a meeting afford me greater pleasure. She smiled at me, and said:

"Good-evening! Are you in luck?"

"Not thus far."

"Will you give me an interest in your play? I will bring you luck."

"With pleasure!"

"Here is my stake."

She tossed me a purse filled with napoleons, and turned away without giving me time to ask her how much she wanted to bet. Strange woman! But, at all events, she was just the same as she was the other evening; she was not like her friend.

My partnership seemed to bring me luck in very truth; for the vein changed, and I won. I looked about for my partner, to ask her if she wished to go on, but I did not see her; so I continued to play, and won again. I dared not stop then; but the game was interrupted when tea was served. I saw Monsieur Archibald, Monsieur Guillardin's son, a few steps away, and bowed to him; he returned the bow, but very coldly, as if he did not care to renew the acquaintance. He need have had no fear, I was nowise inclined to strike up an intimacy with him; I remembered the way he looked at me on the night of his sister's wedding. I fancied that he looked upon me as a rival aspirant for Madame Dauberny's favor. How many false conjectures are constantly made in society!

Certainly I had had very little entertainment in that house. Madame Sordeville laughed and talked with everybody but me. I was evidently mistaken the other evening, when I thought that she looked kindly upon me, that she felt drawn toward me.

"Oh! these women!" I thought; "one never knows what to depend upon with them! But, yes, there is one thing that one can depend upon; I do not deem it necessary to name it."

I was strongly inclined to go away; but I must first settle my account with my partner, and Madame Dauberny was at that moment deep in conversation with a gentleman possessed of a superb pair of red moustaches, and chin whiskers of the same hue. He was talking with

much animation; and I am very much mistaken if he was not making a declaration of love to Madame Frédérique.

You will say that I am prone to discover love intrigues everywhere. The fact is that they are the commonest things in the world. And if we see many of them, you may be sure that there are many more of which we have no suspicion. Madame Frédérique was listening to her companion as if he were telling her the story of Telemachus. I determined to wait until they had finished. I sat down in a corner of the salon, and pretended to listen to a man who had been drumming on the piano for a long time, without anyone being able to tell what he was playing. Luckily for him, nobody seemed to be paying any attention to him.

In the midst of that assemblage of persons, almost all of whom were unknown to me, I had a feeling of emptiness, of melancholy, which did not surprise me at all. There was no one there who cared anything for me! Why should I care for them? I had come there on account of a woman who had fascinated me, whom I already loved, whom I would have adored; but her cold greeting, and her coquetry with all of her male guests, had forced back into the depths of my heart the sentiments she had inspired. I was vexed that I had fallen in love with her; I determined to think no more about her. Balloquet was more fortunate than I: he never took love seriously; he made an acquaintance as he ordered a coat; when the coat ceased to please him, he tossed it aside, often before it was worn out. He was right; that is the only sure way of being always well dressed. For my part, I have always had a deep-rooted feeling for the women who have been my mistresses. I do not refer to those I have known for a few days only; I do not call them

mistresses. You will find it hard to believe that a man loves sincerely, when he confesses that he has had several mistresses at the same time. But are you familiar with the workings of the human heart? Nature has eccentricities and secrets which we shall never know.

It is probable that my reflections had not given a cheerful cast to my expression; they absorbed me so completely that I did not notice the superb Frédérique, who had stopped in front of me and finally said to me in a mocking tone:

"Mon Dieu! how you seem to be enjoying yourself, Monsieur Rochebrune!"

"Enjoying myself! No, indeed! and but for you, I should have gone away long ago. We won twenty-eight napoleons, and I have put your share in your purse; here it is, madame."

"That is first-rate! I brought you luck, you see."

"True; but that's all the luck I have had to-night."

"I understand! Poor boy! somebody has not treated him as he had hoped."

I contented myself with a slight movement of the head.

"I am tempted to afford you a little diversion," continued Frédérique. "Will you come and take supper with me?"

I looked up at Madame Dauberny. She saw that I took her suggestion for a joke, and she instantly added:

"What is there so extraordinary in that? I am in the habit of having supper every night; I invite you to join me, and, if you accept, I shall invite another gentleman, who has just made me a most grotesque declaration of love; but he's a Prussian, and hasn't perfect command of our language."

"Is it the gentleman with red moustaches?"

"Just so; Baron von Brunzbrack. There's a name for you! I have fairly turned his head, but I give you my word that I did it unintentionally. Come, what do you say—do you accept?"

"With great pleasure; but, if I remember rightly, the night that I had the good fortune to make your acquaintance, you denied me the favor of calling on you."

"That is quite possible; you see, that night, I thought for a moment that you proposed to make love to me. I was an idiot! You are in love with Armantine only; and as you have discovered to-night that many others besides yourself are in love with her, you are melancholy, ill-humored, desperate. Ha! ha! I have guessed the truth, haven't I? Come, monsieur, give me your hand; by taking you away, I advance your interests much more than you do with your languishing airs; all women are jealous of their conquests, and Armantine will think that I am trying to steal one of hers. You will be the cause of a dispute between us, but it will be only a cloud which the slightest breeze will blow away."

The hope of causing Madame Sordeville some chagrin made me radiant. I gladly took the hand that was offered me. A large part of the company had already disappeared. Madame Dauberny said a word in the ear of the Prussian baron, who was standing like a sentinel in the middle of the salon. That word produced a magical effect: Herr von Brunzbrack jumped back and landed on the feet of the gentleman who talked with his eyes closed; he opened them very wide now, however, exclaiming:

"Take care, monsieur! you've lamed me for life! What on earth is the matter with you?"

Herr von Brunzbrack was profuse in his apologies; but at that moment he was so transported by the invitation

he had received from Madame Dauberny, that, while he was apologizing, he trod on the dress of a lady who stood beside him, then overturned a chair, and, as he stooped to pick it up, caught his coat buttons in the lace-trimmed cloak of a lady who had just put it on to go home. The poor Prussian lost his head; he did not know where he was; he dared not take a step forward or back. Frédérique extricated him from his plight by taking his arm and leading him away.

"Come, baron, come," she said; "we are waiting for you!"

We three left the salon; I cast a glance at Madame Sordeville, who seemed thunderstruck to see me go away with Madame Dauberny, who had sent the baron on ahead and had taken my arm with the greatest familiarity.

I felt a thrill of joy and satisfaction, which fully compensated me for all the tedium of the evening. Frédérique was right; by taking me away with her, she had served my passion more effectually than I had done by all the ardent glances I had bestowed upon the seductive Armantine. Women are never mistaken as to what it is necessary to do to make sure that the arrow reaches its mark.

XVIII

BARON VON BRUNZBRACK

The baron's carriage, which was at the door, conveyed us in a very short time to Madame Dauberny's, on Boulevard Montmartre.

On the way we said little; the baron was still dazed by the gaucheries he had committed and his joy at being invited to sup with the fair Frédérique; and, besides, I fancy that my presence embarrassed him; he did not know upon what footing I stood with the lady, but he saw that I too was to sup with her, and I think that that fact kept his mind busy.

Our singular hostess also seemed to be in a contemplative mood, and I was thinking of the glance Madame Sordeville bestowed upon me when I left her salon.

But Madame Dauberny resumed her playful mood as soon as we reached her house, and devoted herself to the duties of a hostess. I was very certain that we should not meet her husband; I had a secret conviction that he never attended her little supper parties.

"Three covers," said Frédérique to a servant who was in the reception room. "And a good fire, for there's no satisfaction in eating when one is cold. Is there a fire in the salon?"

"No, madame; but there is one in your room."

"Very well! let us go to my room, then, messieurs; you will allow me to receive you in my bedroom, will you not? At one o'clock in the morning, we may snap our fingers at etiquette."

"Ah, madame!" I said, bowing low; "it is a great favor, for which we thank you."

"Ah, montame!" said the baron, in his turn, with a still lower bow; "id vould pe fery bretty in any room mit you."

Without listening to our thanks, Madame Dauberny had already left the room before us. A lady's-maid carried a light. We arrived in the bed chamber of the lady whom Monsieur Archibald called a *gaillarde*. It was a delicious spot, furniture and draperies being in the most perfect taste; an alabaster globe hanging from the ceiling cast a soft light upon everything. Quantities of flowers, in lovely Chinese vases, filled the air with an intoxicating perfume. It was the retreat of a *petite-maîtresse;* there was nothing there to suggest a *gaillarde*. I expected to find foils, pipes, and statuettes; I found nothing but flowers, and inhaled nothing but perfumes.

We were hardly ushered into her room when the charming Frédérique left us, saying:

"Messieurs, I crave your permission to go and make myself comfortable."

I was left alone with the Prussian baron; I examined him more closely, while he gazed amorously at the bed which stood at one end of the room. Herr von Brunzbrack seemed to be about forty years of age; he was tall and well built and powerful—a man of the type of those from whom Frederick the Great recruited a regiment of grenadiers. His blond coloring was a little too pronounced, although his hair, cut in military fashion, was less red than his moustaches; he had great blue eyes on a level with his face, which were always wide open, and which had not an intelligent expression; but, on the other hand, there was frankness in them, and a kindliness that

soon gave place to wrath if anybody seemed inclined to make sport of him. Taken as a whole, Herr von Brunzbrack had what is conventionally called a "good face." He laughed very readily, opening a cavernous mouth; but he resumed his seriousness so suddenly that one was surprised to have heard him laugh.

As he spoke French with difficulty, he deemed it advisable to accompany his words with a pantomime which he considered most expressive, I doubt not, but which was often more grotesque than intelligible.

I do not know whether he was taking the trouble to draw my portrait at the same time, but I noticed that he glanced at me now and then out of the corner of his eye.

I tried to converse with him.

"This chamber is decorated with exquisite taste!"

"Ja! te shamber pe fery bretty."

"This cabinet is full of curious and well-selected objects."

"Ja! tere's a lot of leedle chems—for shildren."

"But the ladies like them, too."

"Oh, ja! te ladies haf shildren for blaytings."

"But I don't think that Madame Dauberny has any children."

"Oh, ja! all apoud—and on te mandel, too."

I did not understand him. I looked at the flowers in the vases, and said:

"There's nothing prettier and more ornamental than flowers! What a pity that they are perfect poison in a bedroom!"

The baron opened his eyes even wider than usual, and looked all about; I am not sure that he did not stoop to look under the bed. Then he rejoined:

"I see no *poisson* [fish] in te room."

Luckily, Madame Dauberny's return put an end to this interview, in which I found little amusement.

At sight of Frédérique, a cry of admiration escaped the baron and myself. She had put on an ample robe de chambre, of blue cashmere, caught in at the waist by a girdle of orange silk. The gown was buttoned to the neck, about which was a narrow white silk cravat, carelessly tied. Her feet were encased in fascinating orange slippers, studded with steel beads. Lastly, on her hair, which she had arranged in haste, in a *bandeau* on one side, and on the other in long curls, she had placed a small blue velvet toque, with an enormous silver tassel, which hung down on the same side as the curls and seemed to intensify their brilliancy.

It is impossible to describe the charm which that négligé costume imparted to its wearer. Her figure was so gracefully outlined by the folds of the cashmere, her unique headdress gave so much expression to her features, that the baron and I remained under the spell and could not tire of gazing at her.

"Here I am," said Frédérique, with a smile. "As you see, I take the liberty of supping in a robe de chambre."

"Ah! how loafely you pe so!" murmured the baron, passing his right hand over his face as he spoke, kissing it, and throwing kisses to the ceiling.

"All right, all right, my dear baron! As I have told you, I can understand you without pantomime; so you may spare yourself so much extravagance of gesture.—Let us toast ourselves, messieurs, while we are waiting for our supper."

As she spoke, Frédérique seated herself in a great easy-chair in front of the fire; we took armchairs and

moved them to her side, and in a moment all three had our feet on the andirons.

"Now," said Frédérique, "a few words by way of prologue to our supper.—You, Baron von Brunzbrack, I have known only two months, having met you in society; but I know that you are an honorable man. This evening you made a declaration of love in due form. You think, perhaps, that it was on that account that I invited you to sup with me. It is my duty to undeceive you. I do not love you, my dear baron; my heart will never beat one little bit faster because of you. It was to tell you that, and, at the same time, to offer you sincere friendship in place of love, that I asked you to sup with me. I trust that you are content with my course of action, and that you will show yourself worthy of my friendship."

The baron rolled his eyes about in most extraordinary fashion; he made a piteous face; he did not know whether he ought to appear offended or gratified; he looked down at the floor, heaved a sigh, and was about to take refuge in pantomime; but Frédérique placed her hand on his arm, saying:

"Sit still, and let me go on. I now present to you Monsieur Charles Rochebrune; I have known him only five days; he is a more recent acquaintance than you, but I know whom I am receiving; I know monsieur as well now as if we had been brought up together. Well, baron, do you know why I have invited monsieur to share my supper with you? It is because I know that he has no thought of loving me, of paying court to me; because his heart is wholly occupied by a very pretty woman, who has tormented him cruelly this evening, but who will be more amiable another time, no doubt."

The baron had no sooner heard these details concerning me than his face beamed with joy. The honest German had probably taken me for a rival, and a happy rival, I suppose; but as soon as he learned that nothing of the sort was true, and that I was not in love with Madame Dauberny, he turned to me and grasped my hand, crying:

"Ah! you not rifal of me. Gif me your hand; ve pe gut frents, ve untershtand each oder, ve tell each oder all ve haf onto our hearts."

And Herr von Brunzbrack put one of his hands to his breast, shook his head violently, and stamped on the floor like a horse anxious to leave the stable. I hastened to give him my hand, which he squeezed until he hurt me, repeating:

"Ve pe gut frents. Montame, she not bleeze you, hein?"

"We need not go so far, monsieur le baron; I beg you to believe that I do full justice to madame's wit and grace and abundant charms."

"Oh! enough! enough!" cried Frédérique; "you will alarm him. Just tell him simply that you are not at all in love with me and never expect to be."

I do not know why I was reluctant to say that; I looked at the graceful folds of Frédérique's gown, and did not reply.

"You see, my dear Herr von Brunzbrack," continued our amiable hostess, "I thought it best to tell you that Monsieur Rochebrune does not love me, that his heart is engrossed by another; in short, that you must not look upon him as a rival, for I saw you glaring at him with your big eyes, which are very savage when they are not very sweet; and because it is more agreeable to me

to see perfect harmony between my guests. But do not reason from that, that other men do not make love to me, and that I do not love anybody. I have told you that you would never be my lover, so that you have no rights over me; and whenever it pleases me, even in your presence, to allow myself to be made love to, remember that you will have no right to say the least little word. Otherwise, it's all over between us; I withdraw my friendship, and I see you no more."

The baron heaved a sigh that reminded me of the low notes of the stout singer I had heard that evening. He beat his brow, gazed at the ceiling, then took my hand and shook it so that he nearly put my shoulder out of joint.

"Ah! my gut frent," he murmured, "montame can pe fery unkind. I know not how to say. But, nefer mind, ve must do als she say. But alvays shall I loafe her; alvays shall I loafe her madly."

"As for that," said Frédérique, "you may do as you please; I have no further concern with it. But I am not at all worried about your future repose. When a man sees that he cannot retain any hope, he soon ceases to love."

"Not te Prussian! Nein! nein! te more unhappier he is, te more constant he is!"

"So much the worse for the Prussian, then; the best thing he can do is to adopt the French fashion. But we have had enough of love and of unveiling the secrets of our hearts; you must understand, baron, that this subject of conversation would soon become monotonous to us all. I propose that we don't have any more of it at supper."

"Madame is served," said a footman.

"Bravo! Come, messieurs, give me a hand each. I will escort you. Remember that I command here, and that I must be obeyed."

"Here and everywhere, madame."

"Ja," said the baron, "eferyvere and elsevere."

XIX

THE LITTLE SUPPER PARTY

Frédérique led us through a narrow hall, at the end of which we entered a small room, well carpeted and deliciously warm; in each corner, and between the windows, were boxes of growing flowers. The apartment was too elegant for a dining-room, and not enough so for a boudoir. A table was laid there, with all the luxurious appointments that add so much to the charm of a repast.

"This, messieurs, is what I call my *Petit Trianon*, or my *petits appartements*—that is to say, it is the room where I receive my friends. I need not tell you that my husband is never admitted here. I believe that you did not come here to see him. We are like the sun and the moon: we are never seen together unless there is some serious disturbance in the solar system. As we have agreed that each of us shall enjoy absolute liberty, we live up to our agreement."

"Ten id is apsoludely as if you haf no husbant, hein? Ha! ha!"

"Oh! it isn't the same thing, by any means.—To table, messieurs!"

We took our places, Frédérique between us, of course. Her affable, unconventional manner instantly put her guests at their ease. The baron was radiant; he rolled his eyes about, and kept repeating:

"Ich loafe sehr viel your *betit Trille-anon.*"

"Flowers everywhere!" I said, glancing at those on the table, and at the boxes that surrounded us.

"Yes, I adore them; I must always have some about me."

"Birds of a feather flock together."

"Oh! my dear Rochebrune, pray don't put me on a diet of insipid compliments! I detest them. I prefer the volnay. Come, messieurs, drink! Do you prefer chambertin—or pomard? You have only to speak."

"I should mit bleazure trink all te drei."

"And you are quite right. Vive variety! It is charming, isn't it, messieurs?"

"It's very nice, in the matter of wine."

"And in everything else! own up to it, hypocrite!"

"I am too honest to contradict you."

"That's right! Why, see my flowers—how lovely they are! these roses and camellias and hyacinths and cactuses! Would the bouquet be so pretty, if I had nothing but roses?"

"Evidently, flowers are your passion."

"Faith! yes; and I believe the only one I have ever had thus far. Perhaps that is the reason I have been so frivolous, so fickle."

"I vould like to pe a tulib," murmured the baron.

"You choose ill, baron; the tulip has very little charm for me; I care little for odorless flowers."

"In tat case, I vould like to pe—a beony."

"Ha! ha! ha! you are not happy in your choice of flowers. Well, messieurs, what did you think of Monsieur

Sordeville's reception? Was the concert good? I arrived very late."

"Faith! that was lucky for your ears; for there were a lady and a gentleman who put us to a severe test. By the way, a young man, with a very light complexion, sang some ballads tolerably well. Who was he, I wonder? He talked a good deal with Madame Sordeville."

"Oh! I know: it was Mondival. He's very good-looking, but a fool; he's conceited, and I hate conceited men. I prefer them ugly—and clever. I don't mean that for you, messieurs."

And the fair Frédérique laughed aloud. The baron felt called upon to follow suit. I said nothing, for I was thinking of Armantine. My neighbor, noticing my serious face, nudged me with her knee.

"Well! he has nothing to say!" she exclaimed. "Have I offended you? But, no—I said nothing that was meant for you."

"Offended me? How, pray?"

"He doesn't even know what I said! He's thinking of his Armantine; I was sure of it! Do you love her so much, then—with all your heart, as they say?"

"Yes—that is to say, I did love her."

"And it's over already, because she played the coquette?"

"She paid no more attention to me than if I had been a perfect stranger."

"But she hasn't known you so very long! And then, I warn you that she is extremely capricious."

"Oh! I have noticed that; it's a wretched fault."

"It's common enough among *petites-maîtresses.* I am not capricious, myself; to be sure, I am not a *petite-maîtresse!* Pray drink, messieurs; you lag behind.

You're not lusty suppers! Look at me: I'll set you an example."

Frédérique emptied her glass at one swallow. The baron tried to do the same, but swallowed it the wrong way; he left the table, to cough and stamp on the floor. The servant brought champagne and malvoisie; the supper was delicious. I began to feel less melancholy; Madame Dauberny's example led me on, and I did honor to the good cheer.

The baron, having ceased to cough, resumed his seat; his cheeks were beginning to turn purple.

"In a moment," said Frédérique, "I will dismiss the servant; then we will put our elbows on the table and talk nonsense."

"Ja! ja! nonzenz, I like to talk nonzenz; und mit unser foot on te table; tat vill be sehr amusing."

"Not the feet; that would be uncomfortable. I said elbows."

"Ja! te knees."

"Impromptu parties forever! they are the only merry ones. Certainly I had no idea this morning that I should have you gentlemen to supper this evening, or rather to-night; and you didn't expect to come here."

"We did not foresee our good fortune."

"Oh! you are stupefying with your compliments, Rochebrune! I like to believe that you talk differently to the women you love. However, there are women who like that sort of talk; Armantine doesn't detest compliments."

"I assure you, madame, that I had no intention of paying you one. But one can no longer say what one thinks. This supper is a genuine piece of good fortune, so far as I am concerned: I was depressed, you have

restored my good spirits; I had abandoned all hope, you have renewed it; in truth, I can't tell you why I feel so happy now! You are willing that we should say just what we think, are you not?"

"Oh, yes! for I do, myself."

"Well, you have a headdress that does my heart good! If you knew how becoming it is to you!—Isn't it true, baron, that madame's headdress is fascinating?"

The baron began by offering me his hand; I had no choice but to take it; and he began to shake mine, crying:

"You not pe in loafe mit her, nicht wahr? you haf id to me pevore supper bromised."

I could not help laughing at the baron's anxiety concerning the state of my heart.

The seductive Frédérique shrugged her shoulders slightly, and said with some show of impatience:

"Why, no, a thousand times no! he doesn't give me a thought! Can't a man tell a lady that her headdress becomes her, that he likes that style of headdress, without being in love with her? If you return to that subject, Monsieur le Prussien, I'll put an end to the session."

"I am dumb."

"Oh! talk, but talk about something else.—*Vivat!* we are free at last!"

The servant had left the room, after bringing the dessert. Frédérique filled our glasses, then rose, and rang a bell.

"I forgot the best of all," she said.

The servant returned.

"Bring cigars, cigarettes, pipes, and tobacco, Jean. Hurry!"

The baron uttered something very like an oath of admiration.

"*Sapré tarteff!*" he cried; "are ve going to schmoke? Is id bermitted?"

"I not only permit it, but set the example; not always, by the way, but to-night we are so snug and cozy, and I am like Rochebrune, I am satisfied with my supper."

"Ah! do you smoke, madame?"

"Does that surprise you?"

"Nothing surprises me that you do?"

"Really! I don't know whether I ought to take that as a compliment. But I must, must I not? one should take everything in good part."

"Is it possible that I could dream of criticising you, who have been and still are so kind to me?"

"Really! you think that I am kind?—Ah! here is what I sent for."

The servant drew a small table near the supper table, and placed on it a large assortment of pipes, cigars, and several kinds of tobacco. Each of us chose what he liked best. I supposed that Frédérique would confine herself to cigarettes, but she took a very fine Turkish pipe and filled it with tobacco from the same country. Then she threw herself back in her chair, emptied a glass of malvoisie, and smoked with the abandon of a Mohammedan.

The baron clapped his hands, murmuring:

"Sehr gut! sehr gut! you haf all te qualidies to bleeze."

"Because I smoke? Why, my dear Brunzbrack, many people would call that a vice."

"Ach, ja! I say tat to you id pe most pecoming; you pe a she-pear——"

"A she-bear! Ha! ha! that can't be what you mean."

"Bardon—how do tey say?—an animal of te desert—te female of te king of animals."

"A *lionne* [lioness]; that is what you mean."

"Ja! you be te *lionne à la mode;* id is all te same."

I took a cigar, and the baron an ordinary pipe, and in a moment we were all smoking for dear life. Herr von Brunzbrack, whom the pipe seemed to make thirsty, emptied his glass very frequently and belauded the champagne; for my part, the malvoisie suited my taste exactly; and I had such an exquisite sense of well-being, seated at that table beside that original creature, who acted just like a man!

"Messieurs," she said, blowing a cloud of smoke at the ceiling, "life has some very pleasant moments."

"It is delicious to me just now."

"Id runs ein leedle; but id is gut."

"What's that, baron? your life runs a little?"

"I did not untershtand; I said id of mein bibe."

"Oh, indeed!—It's a pity that we have bad days, that melancholy thoughts sometimes take possession of us!"

"Melancholy thoughts come only as a result of disappointments of the heart."

"True, you are right, Rochebrune; that is why your thoughts are so sad to-night, isn't it? The handsome Mondival distanced you; he had the pole to-night. Ha! ha! what a way to talk about love! What will you think of me? that I am a very *mauvais sujet*, eh?"

"We should be too fortunate if that were so!"

"Ach, ja! as mein frent Rochebrune say—if id vas so—— *Sapremann*, id is running again!"

"Pray take another pipe, baron; there are enough to choose from."

A thought that had come to my mind several times during supper still absorbed me. I do not know whether Frédérique could read it in my eyes, but, after looking at me a moment, she said:

"What are you thinking about? Come, tell me! It has come to your lips several times, and you keep it back. Is it something very unkind, pray, that you are afraid to say it?"

"No; it's a very natural reflection, but one that I have no right to make, perhaps."

"But you seem to have taken the liberty to make it. I don't like the things one keeps back; they are more dangerous."

"Your gut healt', montame, and te bleazure id gif me to schmoke tis bibe in your company."

"Thanks, baron, thanks!"

"Vill you trink mit me?"

"Certainly I will."

While she honored Brunzbrack's toast, Frédérique kept her eyes on me, and they peremptorily bade me to speak.

"Well, madame," I began, hesitatingly.

"Why do you continue to call me *madame?* I call you Rochebrune."

"But, if not that, what may I presume to call you?"

"I have told you to look upon me as your friend, your comrade. If I were a man, you would call me Frédérique, as I call you Rochebrune; so, call me Frédérique."

"I shall never dare!"

"Why not, when I give you leave?"

"Because you don't seem to me in the least like a man."

She smiled queerly, passed her hand over her head, took off her little cap and tossed it on the floor, ran her fingers through her curls, rumpled up the *bandeau*, and made curls of that, saying, as she thus rearranged her coiffure:

A SUPPER WITH FRÉDÉRIQUE

Frédérique took a very fine Turkish pipe and filled it with tobacco from the same country. Then she threw herself back in her chair, emptied a glass of malvoisie, and smoked with the abandon of a Mohammedan.

"Does Monsieur Charles Rochebrune refuse to tell me what he has had on the tip of his tongue several times?"

"I beg your pardon, madame—I was thinking—I was surprised—not to find—another person here."

Frédérique curled her lip and frowned slightly.

"Do you refer to Monsieur Saint-Bergame?" she said.

"Yes."

"It is true that—three days ago—I should not have taken supper without him. But we have quarrelled."

"Ah! you are on bad terms now?"

"Yes."

"Not for long, I presume?"

"Perhaps so. When one has been able to pass two days without trying to see a certain person, one can pass a week; when one has passed a week, there is no reason why one should not pass a month, and so on. He did something that—displeased me, and I told him so. Instead of apologizing, he thought it became him to make a scene, and he made a miserable failure of it. He should have come the next day—that same night, indeed—to beg my pardon; he didn't do it, and now I think it would be too late. Look you, my friend—I want to call you my friend, and you give me leave, do you not, monsieur?—I believe that I can do without Saint-Bergame much better than I thought."

As she spoke, she offered me her hand so prettily that I was tempted to throw my arms about her and kiss her. But I confined myself to taking her hand and putting it to my lips; whereupon she hastily withdrew it, crying:

"Well, well! what in heaven's name is he doing? Are men in the habit of kissing their male friends' hands? that is a new idea, on my word!"

XX

BETWEEN THE PIPE AND THE CHAMPAGNE

The baron, who was beginning to be drowsy with the combined effects of the wine and tobacco, and whose eyes were not nearly so wide open as at the beginning of the supper, saw me, none the less, when I kissed Madame Dauberny's hand. He immediately snatched his pipe from his mouth and glared at me, crying:

"Mein gut frent, is id drue tat you pe not ein leedle pit in loafe mit montame? not ein leedle pit, I say?"

"What has stirred you up now, baron?" laughed Frédérique; "are you going to begin again?"

"Nein, but for vat do mein gut frent Rocheverte, he kiss your hand? I haf seen him kiss your hand."

"I did it without concealment, baron, and I ask nothing better than to do it again."

"So! in tat case, so vill ich do id again; but I haf not yet done id at all."

"Fill your pipe, baron, and let my hand alone. We were saying that Armantine's concert this evening was a bit *mouche*, to use a slang term—eh, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame."

"I haf not seen if tere vas *mouches* [flies] at Monsir Sordeville's; but he pe ein sehr bleazant man, sehr—how you say?—he make me much talk; he loafe ven I talk; he say tat I shpeak vell te language."

Frédérique's face suddenly changed; her brow grew dark, and her expression was no longer the same. She looked keenly at the baron, saying:

"What did you talk about with Monsieur Sordeville?"

"Ve talk of pizness. As I haf come to France mit der ambassador, he haf question me of bolitics, of te gufernment, of many serious subjects. He pe a brovound man, he haf alvays agree mit me."

Frédérique seemed to be lost in thought.

"And this was only the second time that you had been to Monsieur Sordeville's?" she asked, after a moment.

"Ja! id vas te second time. I haf met te monsir at te house of Montame de Granvallon, vere I haf had te bleazure to meet mit you."

"And you did not know Monsieur Sordeville before?"

"Not at all; but he make agwaindance so easy, he vas sehr amiable; his vife, as he tell me, she haf peen much frent mit you."

"Yes, Armantine and I were at the same boarding school; we were friends. I left the school long before she did; I refused to learn to do anything except fence and ride, and those things were just what they didn't teach there. I would have liked to go to the Polytechnic, and then to Saint-Cyr; to be a soldier, in fact. I held up to my parents the precedent of the Chevalier d'Éon, who, although a woman, was cunning enough to lead a man's life for years. But they declared that it would be too great a risk. Parents constantly thwart their children's inclinations like that.—When I met Armantine again, she was married, and we renewed our old friendship. She is good-humored, merry, a little inclined to be capricious, a great flirt, but good at heart. As for her husband—in my opinion, he pays too little attention to his wife; he gives her too much liberty. I don't say that she abuses it, but, you see, you gentlemen are sometimes very gallant, very adventurous! And when the husband

is never on the spot, why, it's his own fault if anything happens to him."

"What is this Monsieur Sordeville's business?" I asked Frédérique. She did not answer for some time, but at last she said:

"I thought that you knew him?"

"From having met him two or three times at a house where they give balls and play cards. He talked with me, more or less; he doesn't lack intelligence, he talks well, and possesses the much rarer gift of making others talk. We see so many people in society whose conversational powers consist in interrupting one at every instant, and who do not understand that one may have something better to do than listen to them. I had some talk with Monsieur Sordeville, as I say; and then I met him again at that wedding party, where you were so kind to me, and where he invited me to his house. But I did not dream of asking him what his profession was. Indeed, if he is rich, he is justified in having none."

"It seems that he has some property; but I have an idea that he speculates on the Bourse. Were you better pleased with him this evening than with—did he make himself agreeable? He received you cordially, I have no doubt; but what did you talk about with him? not his wife, I presume?"

"No; he was discussing serious subjects with an old gentleman who kept blinking, or rather closed his eyes altogether, when he spoke. They got onto politics, and talked thereon a long while."

Frédérique was not at all the same woman as our hostess of a few moments earlier. After quite a long silence, during which our lovelorn Prussian continued

to drown his heartache in champagne, I touched my neighbor's arm softly, saying:

"You seem to be a long way off. Are you tired? do you wish us to go?"

Frédérique raised her head, passed her hand across her forehead, and resumed her jovial air.

"Ah! you are right!" she exclaimed; "scold me, my friend. I have fits of musing, sometimes; I fall into a train of thought that is utterly void of sense! It is very wrong in me, for when you are with me is no time for me to have such thoughts. But I don't want you to leave me yet; we get along so well together! Are you inclined to sleep?"

"Oh! no, madame!"

"*Madame* again! You irritate me! Beware! if you go on in this way, I am no longer your comrade."

"Pray don't say that—Frédérique."

"He called me Frédérique! that's very lucky for him! What a lot of trouble I had, to bring him to that! Ah! I am very glad I succeeded."

She sprang to her feet and began to waltz about the table; then stopped in front of a mirror over the mantel, and changed the arrangement of her hair once more, this time twisting a red silk handkerchief about her head, *à la* Creole. Then she went to the baron, took him by the shoulders, and shook him, crying:

"Well! my friend Brunzbrack, you don't open your mouth! Have you gone to sleep?"

The baron raised his head, rubbed his eyes, and tried to open them, as he replied:

"Ach! *zaperlotte!* gone to shleep, me! ven ich bin mit ein so bretty voman! mit ein voman who turns mein head und mein heart!"

"I don't know whether I have turned your head, but it seemed to me that you were hardly following the conversation."

"Id vas te bibe vich haf make mein head heafy ein leedle pit. But I haf not seen! Mein Gott! how you pe bretty mit tis oder way to do your hair! I know not vy you like to blay all tese leedle dricks mit your head, als if id haf not peen bretty enough pevore!"

"Herr von Brunzbrack is right," said I, looking at Frédérique, to whom the red silk handkerchief gave a saucy, wanton look that changed her completely. "Do you know, my friend, that it is ungenerous to keep changing your coiffure, and to invent such alluring ones? Do you want the poor baron here to die of love?"

"Ha! ha! I'm not afraid of that. I have put on my nightcap; isn't a body at liberty to put on her nightcap? But I don't want you to go to sleep, baron! Come, let's sing and drink and laugh! Oh! I am in a laughing mood to-night!"

"Ja! ja! let's trink und sing!"

"Do you begin, baron; but no love songs, and, above all things, no languorous lamentations. What we want is something lively, a little décolleté even. Do men stand on ceremony with one another?"

She filled our glasses, then threw herself back in her chair, laughing till the tears came, because the baron gazed at her with such a tender expression, that his eyes were invisible and his face resembled an egg-plant.

"Come, baron; we're waiting for you."

"Ach! I must sing te first; und so vill I. Vait, till I remember me some bretty song; I know many—vait. Trum, trum, trum, trideri, tram, tram, tram. *Sapremann!* So many I know! Vait! Troum, troum, troum, tradera,

tradera. Id is sehr—how you say?—astonish! Ich kann nicht te peginning remember. Vait—trim, trim, turlulu, traderi——"

"I'm afraid you are stuck fast, my poor Brunzbrack. While we are waiting for your memory to come back, Rochebrune will sing us something."

"I?"

"To be sure. Well! has this one lost his memory, too? Why, what sort of men are these two, that a glass of champagne puts their wits to flight?"

"I am perfectly willing to sing; but I know nothing but nonsensical things."

"Sing us a nonsensical thing! I will allow anything that isn't downright bad. Moreover, I am sure that my friend will not sing me anything unseemly."

"On the contrary, I am very unseemly, sometimes."

"In that case, monsieur, keep quiet."

She assumed a pouting expression, and I hastened to hum a tune, saying:

"This is only a little free."

"Go on, then; I'll let it pass. Vadé, Gallet, Favart. Clever things are never indecent, because if they were they would not be clever."

"I am trying to remember the tune."

"Mon Dieu! how insufferable they are with their tunes! Here, how is this: Tra la la la—tra la la; you can sing any song to that."

"You are right; it's from the *Famille de l'Apothicaire.*"

"I don't know what family it's from, but if it's all right—— Begin, monsieur."

"Here I go! I am going to sing *Le Vent.* Have I your permission?"

"*Le Vent* it is!"

"I beg you to believe that it is not the *Vent* which is the key to the riddle in *Le Mercure Galant*."

"I trust not; it's the *vent* [wind] that *blows through the mountains;* the *vent de Gastibelza*."

"Just so. I am going to begin:

"'Quand on te propose——'

Ah! that won't go to the tune of the *Famille de l'Apothicaire*."

"That's strange; it ought to. Try some other tune."

"I think the *Baiser au Porteur* will do the business."

"Oh! how long it takes you to get started, my dear fellow!"

"I begin:

"'Quand on t'offre une promenade——'"

"Trum, trum, trum, traderi dera, troum, troum, troum."

"Oh! please be kind enough to hold your tongue, baron, with your troum troum!"

"I dry yet to find mein tune."

"You can find it later; listen now to Rochebrune, who is going to sing us a *risqué* little chansonnette."

"Ach! gut, gut! *risqué!* tat must pe sehr amusing! *Risqué!* Vat is a *risqué* chanson?"

"That means lively; but we may as well speak out, as we are all men: it means naughty."

"Ach! id vill pe sehr bretty so! I loafe tat kind! Ve vill much laugh. Let us hear te naughty song. Ha! ha! How id vill pe amusing! Ho! ho!"

The baron laughed so heartily in anticipation of the pleasure in store for him, that Frédérique had much difficulty in silencing him; he ceased at last, and contented himself with muttering between his teeth: "Naughty,

risqué!—risqué, naughty!" while I sang to the tune of the *Baiser au Porteur:*

"'Quand on t'offre une promenade,
Lisa, prends garde au temps qu'il fait!
S'il fait du vent, dis-toi malade,
Ou bien, l'on en profiterait
Pour te faire ce qu'on voudrait.
Va, je ne ris pas, sur mon âme!
Par ce temps-la je fus prise souvent!
Ma chère, il n'est pour une femme
Rien de plus traître que le vent.'" *

I paused after the first verse and glanced at Frédérique. She smiled; that was a good sign. As for the baron, he repeated each line after me, sometimes with variations, and with an accompaniment of loud guffaws. We heard him mumbling:

"Noding so slyer als der vind! Ho! ho! ho! Gut, gut! Naughty!"

"Go on," said Frédérique.

I cleared my throat, drank a glass of wine, and cried like Ravel in the *Tourlourou:*

"Second verse, same tune:

"'Et puis, comment veux-tu qu'on fasse?
On s'habille quand il fait beau:
Le vent arrive, on s'embarrasse,
On ne peut tenir de niveau,

* When you're asked to take a walk,
Look well to the weather, Lisa!
If it blows, say that you're ill,
Or else he'll make the most of it,
To work his wicked will on you.
Nay, I joke not, on my soul!
On windy days, I've oft been caught!
My love, for us poor, helpless girls,
There's naught so trait'rous as the wind.

Le bas d'sa robe et son chapeau ;
On a les yeux pleins de poussière
Lorsque ça souffle par devant,
Mais c'est plus perfide, ma chère,
Quand on n'voit pas venir le vent.' " *

"My loafe! Ven she don't feel te vind plowing! Ho! ho! gut! gut! gut! Troum! troum! troum!"

Frédérique laughed outright.

"Oh! how insufferable he is with his repetitions! Next verse."

" ' Si la pluie est désagréable
Et sur nous mouille nos jupons,
Le vent est libertin en diable!
Il dessin' ce que nous avons.
Il nous fait comm' des petits cal'cons ;
Un homme, alors, garde moins de mesure,
Car ça le monte au ton du sentiment!
Et ce n'est pas notre figure
Qu'il regarde tant qu'il fait du vent.' " †

* And then, what can a poor girl do?
She dons her good clothes, when 'tis fair:
The wind springs up, she's in a mess,
She cannot hold her hat in place
And skirts and flounces all at once ;
Her eyes are quickly filled with dust,
When in her face the sly wind blows ;
But 'tis more trait'rous far, my love,
When she sees not the wind's approach.

† If the rain is most unpleasant,
And wets our poor skirts thro' and thro',
The wind's as wanton as the deuce!
He draws in outline all our figure.
'Tis just as if we wore tight breeches ;
A man at such times is less careful,
For it makes him sentimental!
And, my love, it's not our face
He looks at while the wind is blowing.

"Ho! ho! ho! gut! gut! Id is not te face. Ich nicht untershtand."

"So much the worse for you, baron; for I don't propose to have it explained to you. It seems to me that it's plain enough. It's a little free, but it's amusing. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Only three verses! That's a pity!" And Frédérique put her glass to her lips, adding: "After all, where's the harm? In the old days, men sang more and they weren't so ill-tempered as they are to-day. Poor French gayety! what has become of thee? O merry meetings of the *Caveau!* In truth, it was only to sing that men sought admission to thy meetings."

"Troum, troum, traderi dera. Ach! I remember me mein song now."

"Let's have it, baron; we are listening."

The baron opened his enormous mouth, and we supposed that a stentorian voice would issue therefrom; but we were agreeably surprised. When he sang, Herr von Brunzbrack had a shrill voice resembling that of a child of two; it reminded me strongly of the voice of the *Man with the Doll.*

"'Moi, qui jadis ch'affre eu le gloire,
De chansonner bour Montemoiselle Iris,
Che vais avec votre bermission fous dire l'histoire
Du jeune perger Paris;
Sur le mirlidon.'" *

"Enough! enough!" cried Frédérique; interrupting him without ceremony; "we know that, my dear Brunzbrack.

* I, who once had the glory of singing for Mademoiselle Iris, propose, with your leave, to tell you the story of the young shepherd Paris, etc.

You needn't have taken so much pains to remember that song."

"Vat! you know id?"

"Who doesn't know the *Judgment of Paris;* to the air of *mirliton, mirlitaine?* I think Collé wrote it. Perhaps I ought not to have admitted that I know it; but as I have told you that I am a man, that shouldn't astonish you."

"Id is sehr bretty! Id ended alvays mit: Mirlidon, mirlidaine, mirlidon, don, don."

"Yes. I advise you to think of something else, baron."

Frédérique threw her red handkerchief on the table, then ran again to the mirror, took a little comb from the pocket of her gown, and in an instant entirely rearranged her coiffure. She selected a beautiful white rose, put it in her hair, made curls much longer than before, and gave herself the aspect of one of those charming English faces of Lawrence, which have been freely reproduced in engravings, and which one cannot look at without the reflection that one would be very fortunate to possess the model.

A most extraordinary woman, this Madame Dauberny! How far I had been from imagining her as she then was! What a captivating succession of moods! First, a very madcap, laughing uproariously; then, of a sudden, serious, almost melancholy, stern even; free in her actions, reserved in her speech; one moment assuming the tone and manners of a man; then abruptly recurring to the graces and dainty ways of a woman! I was still uncertain what opinion to form of her; but the one thing of which I could entertain no doubt was her perfect frankness; I was perfectly certain that she

never had any hesitation about saying exactly what she thought.

"Mirlidon, don, don, mirlidaine!" hummed the baron, between his teeth.

Frédérique resumed her place at the table, looked me squarely in the eye, and said:

"Well, comrade, what do you think of this arrangement of the hair? But, first of all, my dear fellow, be assured that there isn't the slightest coquetry in all this! It amuses me to vary my headdress, to give myself a serious, saucy, romantic, harum-scarum look, turn and turn about. I would have liked to be an actress, so that I might have changed my rôle constantly. Sometimes I am as much of a child as when I was twelve years old; but, I repeat, I don't do all this to make myself attractive; it is only to amuse myself."

"Suppose you were coquettish, where would be the harm? You are entitled to be."

"I know it, and that's just why I am not. Still, perhaps I am, unconsciously. They say one doesn't know one's self. Why don't you tell me how I look?"

"Because I am at a loss what to say. You were more alluring a moment ago. Now, your aspect inclines one more to reverie, which, I think, is more dangerous."

"And you, baron—what do you think of my new coiffure?"

By dint of humming *Mirlidon, don, don, mirlidaine*, Herr von Brunzbrack had fallen asleep; his only reply was a mumbled repetition of the refrain.

"He is in some imaginary country," said Frédérique, turning again to me. "Let's let him sleep. For a German, he's a very poor drinker; I mean, he drinks too much. But you are different; you don't show it. It's

great fun to get merry, but it's stupid to get tipsy and go to sleep. For my part, I can drink all the champagne I choose, and it only makes me talkative, expansive, don't you know, my friend, don't you know? Ah! I have a strange fancy; if I don't yield to it, I shall stifle!"

"What is it, in heaven's name? Pray yield to it at once!"

"Well, I have a fancy to *tutoyer** you; are you willing?"

I cannot describe the effect produced upon me by that: "Are you willing?"—A sort of shiver passed through my body. I was moved to the very depths of my being. For a man cannot, unmoved, hear a young and attractive woman address him thus familiarly. It was of no use for me to say to myself that with Frédérique that meant nothing, that it was simply one effect of her originality; I was perturbed, and I did not know what to reply.

She saved me the trouble by going on:

"It's agreed; we will *tutoyer* each other. I will be your confidant, and you shall be mine. Like the intimate friends we are, we will have no secrets from each other. Give me your hand. Your name is Charles, I believe? Well, I will call you Charles; it's less ceremonious than Rochebrune. Come, shake hands. Aren't you willing to address me as *thou?*"

"Oh, yes, indeed! I am delighted! I will gladly address you—address thee—*thou*."

"One would say that it came rather hard! For my part, I feel as if you were my brother, and I had *thou'd* thee all my life."

* *Tutoyer;* that is, to use the more familiar form of address, to "thee and thou" one; which, the reader will please understand, Frédérique proceeds to do, and Rochebrune also, with some slips.

"Ah! you feel as if I were your brother, do you?"

I was not at all pleased to have her look upon me as her brother. Ah! what conceited fools men are! I fancied that I had turned Frédérique's head! Her last words dispelled my illusion. I was silent for a moment, but I soon recovered myself and shook her hand, saying:

"It's agreed, my dear friend: confidences and questions to the fore! Tell me why your brow darkened just now when we were talking of Monsieur Sordeville? Are you afraid that he doesn't make his wife happy?"

Frédérique resumed her grave—yes, sombre air; she lowered her eyes and was silent for some time before she replied:

"You have made an unfortunate choice for your first question. I can't answer it, my dear Charles; there are some things that one must keep concealed in the depths of one's soul, that one cannot reveal—even to a friend—especially when—— I did wrong to give way to thoughts that—— No, it's impossible! it cannot be! I say again: I ought not to have had those thoughts that banished my cheerfulness for a moment. It is altogether useless to mention that subject again."

"I see only one thing clearly, Frédérique; and that is that you have a secret that you won't trust to me. You may do as you please!"

"Now it's my turn to ask questions, monsieur. I have been told—by someone I have talked with about you since that wedding; for I have made some inquiries since then, otherwise you must not think, my dear friend, that I would have asked you to sup with me; a lady in whom I have perfect confidence, and whom you loved dearly once on a time—that ought not to surprise you, you have loved so many! Have you kept notes of your loves?"

"Go on, I beg! What did this lady say to you?"

"She said much that was flattering to you; that's a fine thing on the part of a mistress one has left; but she expected it, she had served her time. Moreover, it seems that you were very considerate in your treatment of her, and that you remained good friends."

"Her name?"

"It's not worth while to tell you. This lady, then, spoke to me about you; I led her on, for I was glad to be posted. You had pleased me at the first glance; I had divined at once that we should be good friends some day—good friends, do you understand? that's much better than lover and mistress: it lasts longer."

"But, you see, I have continued to be that lady's friend, although she was once my mistress."

"That's an exceptional case. Why do you say *you?*"

"I beg your pardon; I am not used to the other yet. You were saying?"

"I keep digressing, don't I? I prattle along, and say everything that comes into my head. Ah! but it's so nice to be able to lay bare one's thoughts! Don't be impatient; there's no hurry. You are comfortable, aren't you? No woman is expecting you, eh? Let my words flow on at the bidding of my imagination, which sometimes whisks me away from one subject to another. You must be indulgent to your friends!"

As she said this, she passed an arm about my waist and leaned against my shoulder; her head was close to my face; and when, as she talked, she raised her eyes and fixed them on mine, our glances mingled. We were so close together that I felt her breath on my cheek. "Ah!" I thought; "this woman must be very cold, very indifferent, to treat me as if I really were her father or

her brother!"—But we were heated by the champagne, and it seemed to affect us differently. Frédérique saw in me only a friend, to whom she could show herself as she really was; whereas I saw in her a lovely woman. Certainly it did not occur to me to make love to her; but the more freely she abandoned herself to her natural unreserve, the more seductive she seemed to me; and I felt that she was putting my friendship to a severe test by almost taking my breast for a pillow.

"To return to this lady—your former friend—she told me that you were engaged to be married some time ago, and that your engagement was suddenly broken off for some reason unknown to her. She asked you the reason, and you refused to tell her; and she has an impression that that was the beginning of your rupture with her."

"That is possible."

"But some things that a man doesn't tell to his mistress, he may confide to an intimate friend. What was it that broke off your marriage? Tell me."

Frédérique's last words suddenly dispelled my gayety; a painful memory drove all before it. I sighed, and held my peace.

"Well! you don't answer?" cried Frédérique, after a long silence.

"The fact is—I am terribly sorry, my charming friend, but you have made an unfortunate choice for your first question, and I cannot tell you what you wish to know."

"Ha! ha! ha! that's a good joke!"

"What are you laughing at?"

"Why, don't you see? here are two intimate friends who have sworn to have no secrets from each other, and neither of us can—or chooses to—answer the first question the other asks! It's almost always so, my friend,

with the plans we make. Let us never bind ourselves to anything—that's the safest way; and then, no matter what happens——"

"Mirlidon, don, don—don, don!"

"Ah! mon Dieu! How that frightened me! I thought that the baron was awake; and, frankly, I am quite willing that he should sleep."

"He is dreaming that he's singing, that's all."

"Look you, my little Charles, there's one thing I will tell you. You think my behavior very strange, no doubt —perhaps very blameworthy?"

"Why, I pray to know?"

"Let me speak. I know very well that I offend the proprieties, that I run counter to the prejudices of the common herd; that people indulge in numberless comments upon me, which are rarely favorable; but I—snap my fingers at them! Listen."

XXI

CONFIDENCES

"I was not twenty-one years old when I was married; but I had already loved, or thought that I loved. I was impulsive and passionate. I come from a region where women do not know how to conceal their sentiments, where they sometimes anticipate a declaration; and in my case, 'the accent of the province is in the heart as well as in the language,' as La Rochefoucauld says. At eighteen, I fell in love with a very comely youth —at eighteen, a girl thinks a good deal of physical

beauty; and that is natural enough, for we pass judgment first of all on what we see. My rosy-cheeked, fair-haired, blue-eyed young man was two years older than I; but he had the manner of a sixteen-year-old schoolboy: awkward, shy, embarrassed; he did not know what to say to me, and was content to stare at me; but, as his eyes were fine, I considered myself fortunate in having them always fastened on my face. 'He loves me,' I said to myself; 'he must be very much in love with me, to stand in rapt contemplation before me as he does.'—Still, I should not have been sorry to hear a word or two of love from his lips. I tried to furnish him with opportunities to be alone with me; I thought that he would finally speak out. But Gabriel—his name was Gabriel—didn't know enough to seize an opportunity. When he came, and I had a girl friend with me, I would motion to her to leave us for a moment; young girls understand each other very readily. But when she had invented some excuse for leaving the room, Gabriel always felt called upon to take his hat and go with her. You can judge whether I used to fret and fume. But one day, when Gabriel started off on the heels of a peddler I had just dismissed, I detained him by his coat tails, and he was compelled to remain; which he did, blushing to the whites of his eyes, and saying:

"'Have I got anything on my back, mademoiselle?'

"'No, monsieur, there's nothing on your back, but I want to talk with you; that's why I detained you. I was driven to resort to this method, because you always run away as soon as I am alone.'

"Gabriel looked at the floor, playing with a little bamboo cane that he usually carried. I invited him to sit down on a sofa beside me; he did so, but moved as

far away from me as possible, and continued to keep his eyes averted, gazing sometimes at the ferrule and sometimes at the head of his stick.

"'Monsieur Gabriel,' I cried at last, irritated by his silence, 'haven't you anything to say to me? Do look at me, at least; before to-day, when you were not speaking, you always had your eyes on me; why, pray, do you gaze at your cane all the time to-day? Come, monsieur, look up, and tell me just what you're thinking about; and come a little nearer; anybody would think you were afraid of me, that I was scolding you.'

"Gabriel made up his mind at last to look at me and to move a little nearer. He was as red as a cherry. He acted like a schoolboy who is afraid of the birch; but he was such a handsome boy!

"'Monsieur,' I continued, 'I see that you don't dare to tell me what it is that makes you sigh so when you are with me. But when a person doesn't explain himself, he doesn't make any headway. As I am less timid than you—as I like to know what to expect—I am going to help you to speak out, for I believe that I have guessed the secret of your heart. You—you—are in love with me, aren't you, Monsieur Gabriel?'

"My bashful suitor began anew to examine the two ends of his cane, which annoyed me beyond words. At last, he stammered:

"'I—I don't know, mademoiselle.'

"'What, monsieur, you don't know? Then you must try to find out. Don't you think me pretty?'

"'Oh, yes, mademoiselle!'

"'Don't you feel great pleasure in being with me?'

"'Yes, mademoiselle.'

"'Then, monsieur, of course you are in love with me.'

"'*Dame!* it is very possible.'

"And he kept on playing with his stick. Unable to contain myself, I snatched it out of his hands and threw it on the floor.

"'It seems to me, monsieur,' I cried, 'that, while I am speaking to you, you might stop playing with your cane; it looks as if you weren't listening to me, and that's very impolite!'

"The poor boy was thunderstruck by my action. He glanced at his cane out of the corner of his eye, and murmured:

"'I wont do it any more, mademoiselle.'

"Somewhat mollified by his submissive air, I continued:

"'Well, Monsieur Gabriel, as you are in love with me, of course you want to marry me; for my parents say that people ought not to love unless they're going to be married. I don't know how true that is. Would you like to marry me, Monsieur Gabriel?'

"'Why, certainly, mademoiselle, if you think it's possible.'

"'Why shouldn't it be, monsieur? Isn't it true that young men are brought into the world to marry young women?'

"'I don't know, mademoiselle.'

"'What's that? you don't know? For heaven's sake, what did they teach you at your school, monsieur?'

"'Latin, Greek, mathematics, geography, mademoiselle.'

"'And nothing at all about young ladies and love and marriage?'

"'Nothing at all!'

"'Much good it does to send boys to school! it's a funny kind of education they get! However, Monsieur

Gabriel, you're in love with me, you love me, you want to marry me; and I ask nothing better than to be your wife. Well, monsieur, you must go to my father and ask him for my hand.'

"'You want me to go to monsieur your papa?'

"'Yes, monsieur, and right away; he's in his study now. Go and prefer your suit.'

"'But—mademoiselle—you see—I don't think I'd dare say that to monsieur your papa.'

"'My papa! my papa! Great heaven! can't you say my *father*, Monsieur Gabriel? You talk like a little boy of six! This is no time to tremble in your shoes and be afraid; if you don't go and make your request, some other man will be bolder than you; he'll speak out, my father will listen to him, I shall be bound to another, and I shan't be your wife.'

"Gabriel summoned all his courage, cast a glance at his costume, and cried:

"'I will go and speak to monsieur your pap—your father, mademoiselle.'

"'Good! and you must come right back and tell me what answer he makes.'

"'Right away?'

"'Why, of course! Do you think that I am not interested in it?'

"'I will come back, mademoiselle.'

"He walked to the door of the salon, then retraced his steps and picked up his stick, which lay where I had thrown it. I stamped the floor angrily, and said:

"'What, monsieur! you have come back for that?'

"'Because I am used to having it in my hand, mademoiselle; it encourages me. When I haven't it, I don't know what to do with my hands.'

"'When a person's mind is occupied, monsieur, he is never embarrassed by his hands. But go, and hurry back!'

"When Gabriel had gone, I was anxious and impatient; I imagined that I loved that young man with a very profound love. In girls of that age, the slightest sentiment, the most trivial caprice, at once assumes the form of a passion. A pleasing illusion! which lasts too short a time, thanks to you, messieurs, who are so well skilled in opening our eyes to the melancholy reality!"

"My dear Frédérique, the illusions and disappointments are the same in both sexes! You are more affectionate, perhaps, but you are more easily fascinated, too. We change without reason, you change from pure coquetry. There is no more fidelity on one side than on the other."

"Do you think so? That may be true. Let me finish the story of my first love.

"Gabriel was not long away; in about ten minutes he returned; his face was flushed, his eyes gleamed—but not with joy. I must tell you that my father, an ex-naval officer, was not good-humored every day, that his language was often brusque, and that his manners corresponded with his language.

"'Well, monsieur,' I said, 'did you see my father?'

"'Yes, mademoiselle.'

"'Did you ask him for my hand?'

"'Yes, mademoiselle.'

"'What answer did he make?'

"Gabriel began to twirl his cane.

"'If you don't keep your cane quiet, monsieur, I'll throw it out of the window! What did father say?'

"'Mademoiselle—monsieur your father—he is not in a very good humor—he listened to me with a sarcastic

expression, and then—then he took me by the hand, and —and put me out of his study. "Go and blow your nose!" he said; "you may come again in ten years and talk about your love." '

"'What! is it possible? My father told you to—to go and blow your nose?'

"'Yes, mademoiselle; and I give you my word I had no desire to.'

"I was petrified. My father's response seemed to me so rude, so humiliating, to Gabriel, that I asked him, looking him in the eye:

"'And you took that without a word?'

"'What would you have had me do, mademoiselle? I could not—threaten your papa, could I?'

"'No, of course not. Well, Monsieur Gabriel, as he looks upon you as a schoolboy, you must show him that you're a man. You must—you must—run off with me.'

"'Run off with you!'

"Gabriel was paralyzed; but I, afraid of nothing, and having no comprehension of the importance of my projected action, continued:

"'Mon Dieu! Monsieur Gabriel, you seem dumfounded. However, it's a very simple matter. You carry me off—that is to say, I run away—to-night, after dinner. No one suspects anything, and it will be easy enough for me to do it. You must be waiting for me at the corner, wrapped in a cloak—do you hear? You must have a cloak,—no one ever abducts a girl without that,—and a broad-brimmed hat pulled down over your eyes. I will wear a long pelisse and a veil. It will be great fun! You must take me—wherever you choose. Then you can write to my father that I am with you, and he can't help consenting to our marriage; that's the way it always ends.'

"'In that case, mademoiselle, I will run away with you; I should like to.'

"'To-night?'

"'To-night.'

"'I will leave the house at eight o'clock; be on the lookout for me.'

"'I will.'

"'And you will wear a cloak?'

"'I have one, mademoiselle; but I haven't a broad-brimmed hat.'

"'Buy one.'

"'To be sure; I didn't think of that.'

"'And think about where you will take me.'

"'I'll think about it.'

"'Now go; until to-night!'

"I can't tell you, my dear Charles, all the thoughts that assailed me as soon as I had persuaded my lover to abduct me. I was glad, and sorry; I looked forward with delight to being abducted, for I had read many novels, and, unluckily, of the sort in which one never finds a truthful line; in which nature, constantly perverted and distorted, like the language of the characters, is made to produce only such individuals as never existed, with an accompaniment of stilted, bombastic phrases; and whose moral is that vice or crime is always triumphant over virtue and honesty. Is it not true, my friend, that those are villainous books, and that if by chance they contain charm of style and poetic thoughts the author is all the more culpable, since he employs his talent solely to disgust us with what is good and beautiful, with what has always been held in respect?

"As I was saying, I was intensely excited, in a sort of delirium, in fact. I had had no mother from childhood!

Abandoned at an early age to the care of paid dependents, never having found a heart into which I could pour out my thoughts and feelings, treated by my father like a little girl, or rather like a boy who was left to himself all day to raise the deuce, I had no one but myself. Ah! if my mother had lived! how many, many things would not have happened to me! She would have made me more prudent and careful; and it is probable that you would not be supping with me to-night.

"I had no thought of drawing back. At the appointed hour, I stole out of the house, wrapped in my pelisse, with a veil over my face, carrying a small bundle, in which, I remember, I had put a ball dress, a pair of bracelets, a package of candy, a toothbrush, three pairs of gloves, two cakes of chocolate, a fan, and a shoehorn.

"I found Gabriel waiting for me. The poor fellow was trembling much more than I was; he had the conventional cloak, but his head was almost invisible in an enormous hat like those worn by the porters at the market; it crushed him, made him look small and insignificant, and was not at all the style of headgear that I had hoped to see on my abductor. And, to cap the climax, he still carried in his right hand that miserable switch which had already caused me so much vexation of spirit.

"He came to meet me, and stammered something or other. I took possession of his arm, saying:

"'Let us make haste, we may be followed. Where's the post chaise?'

"'The post chaise? There isn't any. You didn't mention a post chaise.'

"'I thought that you would understand that. Where are you going to take me, then?'

"'Oh! never fear! I have engaged a lodging. Come.'

"I followed where he led. But I could not help saying to him:

"'That's a horribly ugly hat!'

"'Why, mademoiselle, it has a turned-down brim.'

"'So I see! but it's too much of a good thing. You ought to have a hat such as they wore under Louis XIII, with a feather curled round it. You look like a miller.'

"'*Dame!* you didn't tell me——'

"'Great heaven! must I tell you everything?'

"We halted in front of a furnished lodging house in the heart of the town, into which my abductor escorted me. I considered that very unromantic; I had flattered myself that I was to be spirited away to some venerable château, or to some village inn, where there would be robbers, or, at all events, very dark passages. Instead of that, we were shown into a pleasant, well-lighted room, where a table was laid, but in which there was nothing to suggest that we were to pass the night there. I said nothing, but it seemed strange to me. When we were left alone, Gabriel, who had removed his cloak and his plebeian hat, began to play with his cane.

"'Mademoiselle Frédérique,' he said, 'do you like roast duck with olives?'

"You cannot conceive the impression produced upon me by that question, at a moment when I expected my lover to throw himself at my feet with passionate protestations of love.

"'Was it to feed me on roast duck with olives that you eloped with me, monsieur?' I demanded angrily.

"'No, mademoiselle; but we must eat. They won't take us in here unless we order supper; and while we're waiting for them to come for you——'

"'To come for me! Who, pray?'

"'Why, your papa.'

"'My father come here for me! Who can have told him that I am here?'

"'Why, I did.'

"'You? What do you mean? You bring me to this hotel, to conceal me, and you send word to my father!'

"'Why, mademoiselle, it was you yourself who said to me: "You will carry me off, then you will write to my father, and he'll have to consent to our marriage."—I have followed your instructions; I have sent a letter to your papa by a messenger, telling him that I have carried you off and that we are here.'

"'Oh! is it possible that anybody can be such a stupid fool! Why, monsieur, the time to write to the parents is after a few days have passed; when the elopement has made a great sensation, and they have hunted everywhere for the girl, and when—when—things have happened that—— Oh! how stupid you are, monsieur! Mon Dieu!'

"Gabriel was at his wits' end, and I was choking with rage. At that moment, I heard my father's voice in the street. He was just entering the house, with a friend of his, and I heard him say:

"'It's a boy and girl's joke, but I don't like it.'

"The thought of being found there by my father, and of the bundle I had brought, together with Gabriel's dazed look, drove me into a perfect frenzy of rage; and in my longing to be revenged, to vent my spleen upon someone, I seized my lover's cane, and, without taking time to reflect, beat him soundly over the shoulders before he knew what I was doing. Then I opened the

window—we were only on the entresol—and jumped without a moment's hesitation. I landed in the street, uninjured, hurried home, and succeeded in creeping up to my room without being seen. I quickly scrambled into bed, so that when my father returned he concluded that the letter he had received was simply a hoax, and never mentioned it. As for little Gabriel, I never saw him again.

"That, my friend, is the story of my first love, if one may fairly give that name to the impulsive fancy of a mere girl, which makes her think that she loves the first fair-haired stripling who sighs when he looks at her.

"A few months after this adventure, another young man paid court to me; but he was not timid, not he! he knew how to speak out, and was not at all embarrassed about declaring his affection; he expressed himself too eloquently, perhaps, for he turned my head with fine phrases which I thought superb at the time, but which would seem quite devoid of sense now. After declaring his passion to me, he asked my father for my hand, and was formally refused. He had not a sou, and I have learned since that he was a very bad character. But at that time I looked upon my father as a tyrant, and when Anatole proposed an elopement, to be followed by a marriage, it seemed to me a perfectly natural proposal.

"However, I hesitated. The memory of my escapade with Gabriel had cooled my ardor somewhat on the subject of elopements, and at first I made some objections. Anatole thereupon drew from under his waistcoat a little dagger with a gleaming blade, swearing that he would kill himself before my eyes if I did not consent to be abducted. A man who proposes to kill himself for love of you! That is magnificent, and not to be resisted. I consented.

"The elopement was carried out without difficulty—I was so poorly guarded! This time I had the pleasure of being abducted in a carriage; but we went only three leagues from the city. Anatole told the coachman to stop at an inn, where we were to pass the night. Ah! that time I was in great danger.

"In the common room of the inn, where we had to wait while a room was prepared for us, we met two ladies on their way to Bordeaux. I fancied that I detected an interchange of smiles and knowing glances between them and Anatole. I was suspicious, but I said nothing. I refused to eat any supper, and went up to the room that had been prepared for me, telling Anatole not to put himself out on my account, but to sup without me. He assented, which was in itself rather ungallant; for there are times when a man ought not to think of eating. Although I had had little experience, it seemed to me that that was one of the times.

"A quarter of an hour later, I opened my door very softly and crept downstairs without meeting a soul. As I passed through a hall into which several doors opened, I heard laughter, and recognized Anatole's voice. I went to the door from which it came, and put my ear to the crack. I cannot describe my feelings when I heard the man who had eloped with me speak of me as a little fool whose head he had turned without difficulty. I heard two women's voices also; they spoke sneeringly of me and laughed at my expense; then they kissed, chuckling over the good times they would have with my dowry. I was furious, and for a moment I was tempted to rush into the room and box my seducer's ears as well as his companions'. But I restrained myself, reflecting that a scandalous scene in an inn would compromise

me much more, and that it would be far better to go away without a word and leave Monsieur Anatole to his reflections.

"I had no difficulty in leaving the inn; I found my way to the highroad and entered a diligence going to Bordeaux. To make a long story short, I succeeded in returning home before my absence was discovered; so that my father had no suspicion that I had eloped a second time. That was wonderful luck; but I swore that I would never take the risk again.

"Several days passed before I heard from Anatole, but at last I received a letter from him. He demanded an explanation of my conduct and reiterated his protestations of undying love; in conclusion, he asked for a meeting. You will readily understand that I did not answer the letter. The next day came another, in which he himself appointed a meeting. At that, I went to my father and told him that Monsieur Anatole, whom I could not endure, had the assurance to make assignations with me, and I mentioned the place where he proposed to meet me. My father kissed me in acknowledgment of my trust in him and my prudence, saying that he would take it upon himself to administer fitting chastisement to the impertinent scoundrel who presumed to write to me. In fact, that same evening Monsieur Anatole received from my father's foot a number of blows on a sensitive spot."

Frédérique paused to moisten her lips with malvoisie, and I turned my face so that I could see her better.

XXII

MONSIEUR DAUBERNY

After a moment's silence, during which we both seemed to be lost in thought, Frédérique continued:

"Such, my friend, were the results of my first two girlish passions; I was entirely disillusionized concerning the pretty love romances that girls dream of at boarding school. Some time after, my father proposed Monsieur Dauberny to me as a suitable match. I did not know him, but I readily assented. I did not propose to love again, and it mattered little to me whom they gave me for a husband.

"So I married Monsieur Dauberny. As you do not know my husband, allow me to draw his portrait for you. He was thirty-six years old when he married me, and is now forty-four. A man of thirty-six is still young, especially when he is a bachelor. My husband is a handsome man, with regular features; his face has no mobility, but, at first glance, that lack may easily be taken for gravity; at that time he was not so stout as he is to-day. In the early days of our union, I did not dislike him; I simply thought that he did not take enough pains to please me. I was nineteen years old! Frankly, I was well worth the trouble of making love to. Instead of that, my husband already neglected me to go—where? I did not know; but one day I took it into my head to find out. I dressed as a man; I had often worn a masculine costume for my own amusement, and I wore it with as much ease as that of my own sex.

"I played the spy on Monsieur Dauberny; he took a fiacre, and I followed him in a cabriolet. I supposed that he would go to visit some lorette, or perhaps some grisette. I was surprised when I found that his cab turned into Faubourg du Temple, passed the barrier, and stopped at La Courtille, in front of one of the most famous restaurants there. So Monsieur Dauberny frequented La Courtille. But why did he go there? Was it simply from curiosity? from a liking for those popular scenes, with which the court used to divert itself, so they say, at the Grand-Salon on Rue Coquenard? It was necessary to follow Monsieur Dauberny in order to obtain fuller information. I confess that I hesitated a moment. I felt a sort of thrill of terror when I found myself in the midst of a throng so entirely unfamiliar to me, hearing a medley of shouts, oaths, howling, singing, and laughter all about me. But, as you know, I am not fond of retreating. I entered a wine shop which seemed very popular, and followed the crowd past a succession of long counters, looking about for my husband.

"Everybody seemed to be going up a broad staircase, and I did as the others did. Luckily, my costume, being very simple, did not attract attention. Still, several men in blouses had glanced at me as they passed, saying to one another:

"'Who in the devil's this fellow?'

"'I should think he was some English lord's valet.'

"'How sheepish he looks in his coat! One would say he didn't dare to stoop. My eye! see the gloves! There's style for you! gloves! He looks as if he'd been to a wedding.'

"All this was not calculated to put me at my ease. I hastened to take off my gloves, and stuffed them in my

pocket; then I cocked my hat over one ear, to give myself a swaggering air, and went up to the first floor.

"I found myself in an enormous room, where there was an orchestra. The centre of the room was reserved for dancing and was surrounded by a railing. But outside the railing were tables, without cloths, with wooden benches beside them. There were men and women eating and drinking at almost all the tables. All those people did not hesitate to talk in loud voices, laugh and sing, or blackguard one another. They kept shouting to the waiters, who had much ado to fill the orders of the customers; and when to that uproar were added the music of the orchestra, in which wind instruments and the bass drum predominated, and the clatter of the dancers, who were not shod in pumps, the result was a bacchanalian tumult quite capable of deafening and stupefying a person, especially one who heard it for the first time.

"The heat was suffocating; the room was filled with a heavy vapor produced by the smoking dishes, the wine spilt on the table, the dust raised by the dancers, and the perspiration, which seemed to be the normal condition of the company. There was a sort of mist before my eyes; they smarted painfully, and I felt that I staggered like an intoxicated person. I leaned against a table. A waiter passed me, carrying glasses of eau-de-vie to several women; I asked him for one of them and swallowed it at a draught, amid the applause of the women who sat about the table.

"'He's doing well, that boy is!' said one of them; 'with his little touch-me-not air, he tosses down his dram like a regular fireman! I give him my esteem!—I say, little one, I engage you for the waltz.'

"I thanked them, saying that I did not waltz, and walked quickly away from the table, for they seemed altogether too kindly disposed toward me. At last, I discovered my husband in the midst of the crowd around the tables. He had just taken his seat at one, at which two women in fichus were already seated dressed like fishwomen in their everyday clothes.

"The brandy I had drunk had restored my spirit; I was no longer afraid, but was inclined to fight anybody who chose to place any obstacle in the way of my plans. I stole cautiously behind Monsieur Dauberny, and seated myself on a bench at the table next to his, and ordered wine, bread, and veal cutlets. I could hear my neighbors' conversation, especially as my husband's companions had voices of the sort that drowns every other noise, even that of a bass drum.

"The two women in fichus were young; one was ugly, while the other had rather pretty features. But such a shameless expression! Such bold eyes, such a voice, such gestures, and such language! I have never been prudish, but I confess that I felt the color rising in my cheeks when I heard that woman's remarks. But it seemed to be much to Monsieur Dauberny's taste; for he sat very close indeed to Mademoiselle Mariotte, as they called her whose look seemed to defy a regiment. I heard her call my husband *Bouqueton;* that was the name he had adopted for use with his conquests at La Courtille. They were already acquainted, for Mademoiselle Mariotte said to him:

"'Why didn't you come night before last, as you promised, you vagabond? It was all on your account I accepted a salad and a sword knot from the Gârenboule brothers, who made me drink a lot of stuff and play cards

with 'em till I won all their cash. If you don't keep your word better'n that, I'll play tricks on you as would give the monkeys the go-by!'

"Monsieur Dauberny apologized, and ordered two or three dishes and several bottles of wine. I expected to see him dance with his belle, but he contented himself with treating her and even making her tipsy. Mademoiselle Mariotte was sentimental in her cups; I heard them kissing behind me, but I beg you to believe that my heart felt no wound. Since I had seen my husband make soft eyes at Mademoiselle Mariotte, I had felt nothing but contempt for him, and contempt, I can assure you, is the sovereign remedy for love; but I had never loved Monsieur Dauberny.

"The caresses became more frequent, but that was a very common occurrence in that den; for there was an incessant volley of them from all the tables. Suddenly my husband's mistress rose and led him away.

"'I believe private rooms ain't for wax figures!' she cried.

"And they went off, arm in arm. That time I had no desire to follow them; I had seen and heard enough. I made haste to pay for the food and drink I had not touched, and to leave that wine shop where sport was so noisy and love so shameless.

"I did not see my husband for several days. I said that I was ill, and kept my room; when he came to the door and asked to see me, I alleged my need of rest as an excuse for not receiving him. I felt such an unutterable aversion for him that even the sound of his footsteps upset me completely. However, before deciding definitely what course to pursue, before letting him know that I was aware of his debauched tastes, I asked myself if it were

not possible that he had been led away once by some unusual combination of circumstances; if it would be just to condemn him on the strength of a single act. You see that I meant to deal fairly by him. What I had seen would have been enough to lead many women to consider themselves released from their oaths. But I determined to follow him once more, being fully persuaded beforehand that I should simply acquire fresh proofs of his disgusting habits.

"On the second occasion, instead of putting on a frock-coat and a round hat, I dressed in a blouse, with a workman's cap on my head; I was careful not to wear gloves, and I tried to blacken my hands. In short, I disguised myself as a street urchin. Well for me that I did so! for, instead of leading me to La Courtille, Monsieur Dauberny, who was on foot, went in the direction of the Cité, and in due time turned into a narrow, muddy street, where the houses had a very evil look. I have learned since that it was Rue Saint-Éloy. I remembered the *Mysteries of Paris*, and I shuddered at the thought that I might perhaps have to follow my husband into a *tapis franc!* but my costume protected me, and no one paid any heed to me.

"Monsieur Dauberny stopped in front of a hovel that was styled a café, and looked through the window. It must have been hard to distinguish anything, for the glass was covered with a coating of smoke; and Monsieur Dauberny, who probably had not succeeded in looking in, seemed to hesitate, when a man entered the street at the other end and tapped my husband on the shoulder. I recognized the new-comer as one Faisandé, who was very intimate with Monsieur Dauberny, and sometimes came to the house; but the fellow, who was a clerk at the Treasury, had always seemed to me so reserved in his

language, he professed to entertain such rigid principles and displayed so little indulgence for the most trivial peccadilloes, that I believed him to be a perfect Cato!"

"Faisandé!" cried I; "a clerk at the Treasury! Hypocrite, tartuffe, and debauchee! Ah! that's the very man!"

"Do you know him?"

"He was at the dinner at Deffieux's, the night that I made bold to attend Mademoiselle Guillardin's ball. He was very much shocked because we were a little free in our talk; he preached morality to us."

"Oh! that's the man to the life! Let me finish my story:

"When Monsieur Faisandé appeared, I stretched myself out on a stone bench in front of the hovel. I turned my face to the wall, and listened to their talk.

"'I was waiting for you,' my husband said.

"'Why didn't you go in?'

"'I am not so well known here as you are. I was not sure that they'd give me the little secret room.'

"'You must say: "I am Saint-Germain's friend,"—that's the name I go by here,—and they'd have taken you there at once.'

"'It seems that you're a regular habitué?'

"'I sometimes pass a whole week here, without putting my nose outside the door.'

"'A week! What about your place?'

"'I let it go to the devil!'

"'And your wife?'

"'The same with her. I have never put myself out for her. A week after my wedding, I slept away from home three nights in succession. A man should always put his wife on the proper footing at the outset. You ought to have done the same with yours.'

"'Oh! my wife pays very little attention to what I do. I can stay away all night if I choose; she won't say anything.'

"'That's all right! But let's go in; the women must be here, waiting for us.'

"'How many are there?'

"'Two each, or rather four each, as there are four of them.—Ha! ha!'

"'Pardieu! that's true. By the way, remember not to call me anything but Bouqueton.'

"'And I am Saint-Germain.'

"'It's a good idea to change our names.'

"'All the better, when you have a grudge against someone: you take his name in some risky affair, and if there's any trouble about it, why, it all comes back on the man whose name you took.'

"'What a devil of a fellow! He thinks of everything; he's far-sighted. Let's go in.'

"My husband and his worthy friend entered the vile resort. A few moments later, three or four urchins of fourteen or fifteen years went in, and I slipped in with them. I was anxious to get a glimpse of the interior of the place. It was very bold, was it not, my dear Charles? But there are days when I would brave the greatest dangers; apparently that was one of the days.

"I found myself in a very large room, but no higher than the ordinary entresol. The atmosphere was so dense with smoke that when I went in I could not see a billiard table at one end of the room. Not for some little time did my eyes become so far accustomed to the mist that I could distinguish anything. There were tables on all sides. A large number of men, of all ages, stood about the billiard table, which was dimly lighted by two lamps hanging from the ceiling. A common

kitchen lamp stood on a desk near the outer door. There were no other lights in the room, so that in places it was quite dark. There were, as I say, many people about the billiard table; very few women, but many youths, or rather children, barely fourteen years old, whose worn faces, hollow eyes, and leaden complexions denoted premature debauchery. As for the women! I need not tell you to what class they belonged. There was no noise such as had deafened me at the ball at La Courtille; on the contrary, everybody spoke in undertones, and, except for a few energetic oaths from the billiard players, a forbidding silence reigned. My heart sank when I found myself in that den of iniquity. The dance hall at La Courtille was a veritable Château of Flowers compared with that ghastly café. I stood inside the door, and was about to go out again, when four women entered together. They were all young and shapely, and dressed like the wretched creatures who roam the streets in that quarter; breasts uncovered, eyes inflamed, heads thrown back, and faces upon which all the vices were engraved. Several men in blouses ran to meet them, crying:

"'Ah! here's the *siroteuses!* We're going to have some sport to-night.'

"'Bonsoir, *la fourmi!*'

"'Bonsoir, *la mouche!*'

"But the four women forced their way through the men who surrounded them, saying almost disdainfully:

"'We ain't for you to-night. There ain't no show! We're engaged! Have Messieurs Bouqueton and Saint-Germain got here?'

"'To be sure!' said a woman at the desk, who had been darting fiery glances at me for some minutes. 'They're waiting for you, and the table's set.'

"'The devil! there's going to be a treat, it seems!' cried one of the men.

"'Yes, yes,' said the girls. 'We're going to earn some shiners. And if you behave yourselves, there'll be something for you. Get out of the way! Let us go to work.'

"And the four women hurried to the other end of the room and disappeared through a little door, which closed behind them. I made haste to escape from that horrible place. I believe that it was high time, for the woman at the desk had pointed me out to some men, who were scrutinizing me closely.

"As soon as I was in the street, I ran at the top of my speed. I thought then, and I still believe that I was not mistaken, that I was chased by some men who came out of the café behind me. But some soldiers came along, and I walked beside them until I reached a more frequented quarter. Then I took a cab and went home.

"I cannot tell you what took place in my heart when I was able to reflect calmly on my plight—that I was the wife of a man of honorable birth and breeding, the bearer of an honorable name, who was at liberty to frequent respectable society in Paris, and who had a wife who was young and pretty, and not a fool,—I flattered myself, perhaps!—and that that man was at that moment in one of those sink-holes of vice which are tolerated in great cities because fugitives from justice can be found there; that he was in the company of public prostitutes of the lowest type, and that he would probably pass the night there.

"I trembled convulsively from head to foot, I had paroxysms of passion, and cried in a sort of frenzy: 'And I am tied to such a creature!'

"To calm myself I thought of that hypocrite Faisandé; he too had a wife; I had happened to meet her twice, and I knew that she was young and pretty and had all the qualities of a good wife and mother; she was virtuous, orderly, economical, not coquettish, and she adored her husband! It seems that there is a fatality about it: the worst scoundrels always obtain such phœnixes. Moreover, Monsieur Faisandé had a daughter; but even that did not deter the wretch! He abandoned himself to his abominable tastes, wholly oblivious of the fact that he was a father.

"I, at all events, had no child; and I thanked God for it at that moment. Recovering my strength of will and my courage, I said to myself that in all probability many wives had passed through such ordeals as mine. Ah! if we knew all the family secrets of our friends! This is not romancing, my friend; I invent nothing; it is history.

"I was conscious of a thrill of joy at the thought that I was free; that Monsieur Dauberny had released me from all the oaths that bound me to him. For I did not feel disposed, for my part, to imitate Madame Faisandé, who, although she was aware of her husband's conduct, hardly dared to say a word of reproach, and remained faithful to her vows. That is very fine, but I am not so self-sacrificing! and, frankly, I have never understood that precept of the Gospel about returning good for evil. No, no! let us not forgive an insult, let us not kiss the hand that strikes us; for then the insult and the blow will be repeated. The *lex talionis!* that is the natural law, and it is my idea of justice!

"Three days passed before I saw my husband; he probably passed them in that den where his friend Faisandé sometimes passed a week. At last, Monsieur

Dauberny came to my room one morning and approached me as if to kiss me. I felt as if I were about to come in contact with a toad. I rose hastily, and I doubt not that my face expressed what was passing through my mind, for Monsieur Dauberny stopped in utter amazement.

"'Monsieur,' I said to him, pointing to the door, 'you will never cross that threshold again! More than that, you will never seek to see me or to speak to me. Henceforth we are utter strangers to each other. I will never go out with you; when I dine at home, it will not be at your table; we will have our meals separately. Absolute liberty, monsieur! I shall do whatever I please—absolutely! do you understand, monsieur? And you will not venture to find fault with any act of mine.'

"Monsieur Dauberny, bewildered at first by what I said, tried to demand an explanation. I closed his mouth with these words:

"'I know all about La Courtille, Mariotte, the vile hole on Rue Saint-Éloy, and the four *siroteuses*.'

"He turned deathly pale and trembled like a leaf; he stammered some words which I could not understand, then bowed, and rushed from the room. Since that day—and that was years ago!—I have not exchanged a word with my husband. We live as I had resolved. Sometimes I don't see him for three weeks; and if we chance to meet, we bow, and that is all. The world has become accustomed to seeing me go about without my husband. What the world thinks about it matters little to me! It is so often mistaken in its judgments that we are fools to worry about it. I have always thought that our own esteem was worth more than the consideration which is often most freely bestowed on people who hardly deserve it."

XXIII

A MOMENT OF FORGETFULNESS

"Now, my dear Charles, you know the secret of my entire liberty, and of my conduct, which gives rise to so much gossip; of my inviting you to supper to-night with our dear baron, who is sleeping so soundly now; of my having a table of my own, in short, at which I can entertain whom I please, without the slightest concern as to whether anyone will criticise me for it. Are you glad that I have told you?"

"Oh, yes!" I said, pressing her hand with force. "Yes! In the first place, I am proud of having inspired you with confidence in me. And then, too, I—I——"

"You are very glad to find that I am not such a good-for-naught as you thought at first, eh?"

She was right. Her conduct seemed to me now to be perfectly natural, or, at all events, excusable. Frédérique's head no longer rested on my shoulder: she sat up and passed her hand across her forehead, saying:

"I believe it is time for us to think of separating. I feel a little tired, my friend. You will go home with Herr von Brunzbrack, will you not? He is a little—tipsy, and I should be sorry if anything happened to him. And, although he has his carriage here, he is quite capable of refusing to go home."

"Yes, yes; I will put him in the hands of his servants. But just a moment; why need we separate so soon?"

"The clock has just struck half-past three."

"Suppose it has? what does the time matter, when we are so comfortable and our own masters?"

"Oh! as far as that goes, nobody is more uncontrolled than I am now. Stay on, if you choose. But, if you do, you must tell me something, confide in me. Do you fence?"

"Yes; why?"

"Because, if you do, you must come here and fence with me; it's a form of exercise that I am very fond of."

"What! do you really know how to handle a foil?"

"And very prettily too, I flatter myself. I told you that I was a man; so, of course, I have learned the things that go to perfect a man's education."

"Then you must ride too?"

"Oh! that is another exercise that I adore. We will ride together—and you will see that I am not afraid, and that I have a good seat. But you don't seem to be listening to me! What in the deuce shall I talk to him about?—Poor boy, talk to me about Armantine. It is such a joy to speak of the person one loves! And you are very much in love with her, aren't you?"

I confess that at that moment I was thinking much less of Madame Sordeville. So that I replied, rather coldly:

"I was very much in love with her; but her treatment of me to-night cooled me off."

"Oh! when a man is really in love with a woman, monsieur, he doesn't cease to love her just because she flirts a little with other men; on the contrary, he often loves her all the more for it."

"Coquetry has never had that effect on me."

"Go and see Armantine in a few days, in the daytime. I'll wager that she will be very amiable to you."

"So the lady is capricious, is she?"

"Exceedingly capricious."

"That is a failing which I have never been able to endure."

"Ah! but when one loves a woman, one loves her with all her failings."

"My theory is that when one really loves, one is not capricious in dealing with the object of one's love. Consequently, I am persuaded that all these women who have caprices don't know what it is to love."

"Perhaps you are right. But I think that Armantine is in reality very susceptible."

"You think so? You are not sure?"

"How is one to be sure of other people? one is not always sure of one's self."

We sat for some time without speaking; but to me that silence was not without charm. It is often pleasant to think, in the company of a person who is thinking at the same time.

Suddenly Frédérique looked me in the face and said:

"Well, Charles! you don't seem to talk about Armantine?"

"I have so little hope!"

"Oho! monsieur plays the modest adorer! After all, I don't pretend to say that she will yield to you. That is a mystery—the secret of the gods."

"True; but you might tell me whether—whether any previous weakness on her part gives me reason to hope."

"My dear man, it isn't right to ask me that. If Armantine had given me her confidence, I would not betray it. But, frankly, I know nothing about it. All that I can say is that Monsieur Sordeville is not in the least

jealous; that he gives his wife her liberty in a way that strongly resembles indifference; that Armantine is pretty, coquettish, likes to be courted; and that all those things may very well lead to certain results. But whose fault is it, if not her husband's? Oh! these husbands! I've learned to my cost not to love them!—Well! what are you thinking about? you are not listening."

"Yes, I am. I was thinking that you—that—— Oh, no! it isn't worth while; I prefer not to say anything."

"My dear fellow, you don't like capricious women, you say, and, for my part, I detest a person who begins a sentence, then stops, and doesn't finish it. There's nothing so impertinent as that, in my opinion! It is almost equivalent to a confession that you had something disagreeable to say, and discovered it in time. Sometimes our conjectures go beyond the truth. Finish what you were going to say, I insist! I demand it! or I am done with you! Come, quickly! don't try to fabricate something, for you would simply lie."

Frédérique pressed me so hard that I had no time to invent a lie, as often happens in such cases, and I replied, almost shamefacedly:

"I was thinking of Monsieur—Saint-Bergame; and I was wondering about a lot of things. You told me that you and he had quarrelled. But are you not afraid of offending him still more, if he knows that you had guests to-night at supper?"

Frédérique compressed her lips and frowned. I realized that I had been indiscreet, that I had no right to ask such questions; but the thought had been at the end of my tongue for some time, and it must escape me sooner or later; it had been tormenting me since the very beginning of the supper.

"What on earth made you think of Monsieur Saint-Bergame?" cried Frédérique at last, with something very like anger. "Would you have liked to have him here? Would you have enjoyed being with him? In that case, you are not like him, for he can't endure you. I don't know why it is, but he is not attracted to you."

"I do not regret the gentleman's absence in the least, far from it! But it surprised me, because——"

"Because you had guessed that he was my lover, eh? Mon Dieu! it did not require much perspicacity to discover that!"

"Well! as you make no concealment of it, you ought not to be angry because I ask the question."

"There are some things that one doesn't conceal, or conceals imperfectly, that one doesn't like to have thrown in one's face, none the less. But you have said a lot of——"

"Stupid things! Finish the sentence, pray! I am like you, I hate unfinished sentences."

"Well, yes! *Stupid* isn't just the word, but things that people keep to themselves when they think them."

"I beg your pardon. I have the bad habit of saying whatever comes into my mind. It's a serious fault, I admit, and I have often had occasion to regret it in society. I regret it all the more, because I see that it has annoyed you, for you have ceased to *tutoyer* me; and yet you were the one who said to me just now: 'Let us have no secrets from each other.'"

Frédérique turned her face to mine, with a charming smile, and held out her hand, saying:

"You are right. I was foolish to be angry, as we agreed to be like two brothers. Come, give me your hand! That's right! The fact is, you see, that you

touched a sensitive chord. I have quarrelled with Saint-Bergame; the wound is still fresh; and wounds in the vicinity of the heart do not heal quickly. I will tell you about it."

"No, it's not necessary. I don't want to know it."

"Oh! but I want to tell you, now. Upon my word, he is trying to prevent my speaking!"

"Because I sincerely regret——"

"Hush! Be quiet, and listen.—You know that Saint-Bergame writes for a newspaper?"

"Yes."

"The newspaper in question has much to say about literature and the stage; and Saint-Bergame writes almost all the dramatic criticisms. I have often thought that his judgments were partial and unjust, and I have not hesitated to tell him so. When I have read in his article, after a play has been successfully produced, that it has failed miserably and been hissed, I have exclaimed:

"'What you have written is false! It's a shame! Why do you cry down that play?'

"'Because the author is not my friend. Because he didn't come to bespeak my good will.'

"'So, because an author is conscious of his dignity, because he doesn't go about begging praise; because, in short, he relies upon your sense of justice, your impartiality, you abuse him and belittle his work! And you call that exercising your profession of critic! In that case, it's a vile profession; you had better be a mason, monsieur, if your talents lie in that direction.'

"But Saint-Bergame always laughed at my anger, and that was the end of it. A few days ago, however, I saw at one of the boulevard theatres a very pretty young débutante, who showed great promise in her part.

Saint-Bergame was with me, and echoed my opinion of the young actress's talent.

"'Then, of course, you will speak well of her in your newspaper?' I said. He smiled in a curious way, and answered:

"'We shall see; that depends.'

"'Depends on what? What is there to prevent your writing what you think at this moment?'

"'One of my friends is making love to this débutante.'

"'Well! what has that to do with the article you are going to write?'

"'The girl is playing the prude. She refuses to listen to my friend's proposals, and won't accept his bouquets. That's a familiar manœuvre to increase her value.'

"'But suppose your friend doesn't please her? Isn't she her own mistress, pray?'

"'Bah! that's all mere comedy! She means to lead my friend on. But he has invited her to a nice little dinner to-morrow. I am to be there. If she comes, I exalt her to the skies; if she doesn't, I tear her to tatters.'

"I said nothing, but I cannot describe my sensations. I turned my eyes away so that Saint-Bergame should not see their expression, in which he might read what I thought of him. I waited impatiently for the second day following—that was the day before yesterday. I lost no time in opening the newspaper edited by Saint-Bergame, in which I found an article on the young débutante we had seen. Not only did he criticise her acting, her methods, and her stage manner in the most contemptuous terms, but he also attacked her personal appearance; she is pretty, and he called her ugly; she has a fine figure, and he said she was deformed; she is exceedingly graceful, and he could not find words to describe her awkwardness

and her embarrassment; in short, according to that article, she was a sort of monster who had been allowed to go on the stage to amuse the public for a moment.

"I crumpled the paper in my hands and threw it on the floor; I was furiously angry with Saint-Bergame. When he appeared, I threw his abominable article in his face, and told him that he was a dastard; that a man who would empty his gall so on a woman deserved no woman's love, and that I forbade him to darken my doors again. He tried to insist, to turn it into a joke, and called me hot-headed. But when he saw that I was in earnest, I believe that he lost his temper, too, and asked me by what right I presumed to pass judgment on his writings. I made no answer, but locked myself into my room. He went away in a rage, and I have not seen him since."

"And if he comes back?"

"I shall not receive him. It's all over! all over!"

"And you don't regret him?"

"I regret having had any relations with him—that is what I regret. He's a good-looking fellow, and I liked him. But I realize now that I never loved him."

"But if he loves you, he will return; he will beg you, beseech you."

"He will do nothing of the sort. He never loved me, either. It flattered his self-esteem to make a conquest of me, and that was all. He is one of the men who think that a woman is too highly favored when they deign to look at her. Oh! I know him now, I know him too well! I see him now as he is! Besides, he was not faithful to me, I am sure. How do I know that it was not he himself who was making love to that actress? Ah! my dear Charles, how does it happen that a connection so intimate, which is sometimes based on sincere

love, often leaves nothing but regrets and bitter memories in the heart? After love should come friendship. Should not that be the natural consequence of the relation lovers have borne to each other? But, instead of that, they part in anger, and sometimes come to hate where they have loved so dearly."

"No, Frédérique, no! that does not happen when two hearts have burned for each other with a sincere passion. The connection may be broken, but a pleasant remembrance of the happiness they have enjoyed always remains."

"Do you think so? In that case, I never loved Saint-Bergame. Yes, I am sure now that I didn't love him; and, more than that—would you like me to tell you my inmost thoughts? Well! I believe that I have never loved any man! and I propose to continue on that line; it's much more amusing. Then one treats men just as they treat us—one drops them as soon as they cease to be attractive! You won't say that I am right; but in the bottom of your heart you think so."

"I—I—I am thinking that you are free at this moment——"

"Yes, and I believe I am almost as delighted as I was when I ceased all relations with Monsieur Dauberny."

"Oh! for all that—before long—another sentiment——"

"We shall see; one can be sure of nothing; but not very soon. No, I am in no hurry to assume new chains, however light they may be. I believe that I was born to be independent. It is such fun to do just what you please! For example: if I had been Saint-Bergame's mistress still, I couldn't have had you to supper to-night. It would have displeased him; or else I should have had to conceal it from him; and I don't like mysteries.—

Ha! ha! ha! how poor Brunzbrack is snoring! If that's his way of making love to a woman——"

"He won't be the man to replace Saint-Bergame, will he?"

"No, indeed! Besides, I don't mean to love any more; I have decided. I don't feel sure—whether—I am—right; tell me—if I'm—right. It's very late—isn't it? I must—go to bed. You don't tell me anything; I have to do all the talking myself."

For several minutes Frédérique had had difficulty in fighting against the drowsiness that made her eyelids heavy. While she was talking, she let her head fall on the back of her chair; her eyes closed and still she talked on. But suddenly she ceased—she had fallen asleep.

I turned and leaned over her to gaze upon her at my leisure. I could not tire of contemplating that strange woman, whom I had known so short a time, and with whom I was already on the most friendly terms. I liked that face, which reflected so clearly the impressions of the heart; surely that mouth could not speak falsely! Her forehead was noble and distinguished; at that moment, her lovely hair, through which she had passed her fingers a moment before, fell in long curls about her temples and partly covered her face. I have seldom seen black hair of such brilliancy and of such a beautiful shade. I could understand why she enjoyed changing its arrangement; with that natural adornment she was sure of always looking well.

She was speaking at the moment that sleep overcame her. Her lips were partly open; but her expression was rather serious than smiling. When she fell asleep she threw her body back, so that there was nothing to prevent my examining her bust, her waist, and the graceful

figure which the fine, soft fabric of her gown outlined while it concealed them, and which disappeared at one point beneath the clinging folds, only to reappear farther on more alluring than ever.

I took much pleasure in that scrutiny. I can hardly define the sentiment that made my heart beat fast; but I was profoundly moved. I tried to forget the fascinating sleeper for a moment by glancing about the room; but the oddity of my position, the place, the time, and everything within my view, simply intensified the agitation that had taken possession of me. Imagine yourself, in the middle of the night, in a deliciously cosy retreat, near a table at which you have enjoyed a dainty supper, and on which the decanters are still half full of exquisite wines which you have not spared; the lamps diffusing only a dim light; and beside you, seated, or rather reclining in an easy-chair, a young, fascinating, original woman, a woman who addresses you *thou* and who has confided to you the secrets of her heart; that woman in a ravishing négligé which permits you to admire a portion of her charms and to divine the rest. If all this does not give you a sort of vertigo, upon my word I pity you! As for the third person who was with us, he did not count. He was snoring like a bell ringer, with his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on the table.

I moved nearer to Frédérique, then drew back. I resumed my contemplation of her; and suddenly, unable to resist the impulse that drove me on, I put my lips to hers and stole a kiss in which there was nothing fraternal.

Frédérique woke instantly, pushed me away, and sprang to her feet; her brow was clouded, her bosom rose and fell more quickly, and I thought that her eyes, which she turned away from me, were wet with tears.

"Ah! so this is the way you treat me!" she cried, in a quivering voice. "What do you take me for, monsieur, in heaven's name? I receive you in my house, I look upon you as a friend; and you treat me like one of the women with whom a man seeks to gratify a caprice! Do you suppose that I asked you to my house to make you my lover? that I, the friend of Armantine, whom you love to distraction, asked you to sup with me in order to steal from her the heart of a man who is paying court to her? Ah! you know me very little, monsieur. I do not love you, I shall never love you! It was because I knew that you were in love with Armantine that I invited you this evening and then offered you a brotherly affection. You understand me now. Adieu, monsieur! It is not worth while for you to come to my house again."

She took a lamp and vanished before I had recovered from the shock her words had caused me, or had found anything to say in reply.

But in a few moments my excitement subsided, and I had no other sentiment than irritation at having allowed myself to be so roughly handled by the lady with whom I had supped. I said to myself that when one is dealing with a *gaillarde* of Frédérique's stamp, it does not pay to do things by halves. If, instead of kissing her so gently, I had been more audacious, would she have shrieked louder? I could not say, but, at all events, she would have had some excuse for shrieking. Oh! these women! I utterly failed to understand that one. The idea of forbidding me her house because I had kissed her! Could she not have scolded me gently, instead of flying into a rage? I decided that I should be a great fool to waste another thought on Madame Dauberny.

But as one should never forget to be polite or to keep one's promises, I went to the Baron von Brunzbrack, whom none of these episodes had aroused from his heavy sleep, and shook him violently.

"Wake up, monsieur le baron, it's time for us to go! Madame Dauberny has gone to her room."

He raised his head at last, rubbed his eyes, and exclaimed:

"Vat! is id bossible? Haf I pin ashleep? *Sapremann!* Nein, nein! I vas not ashleep; you tought—you haf been mishtook."

"As you please; but let us go."

"Wo ist te bretty hostess—Montame Frédérique?"

"She has gone to her room, I tell you, requesting us to go home."

"Ach Gott! is id tat she too tought tat I haf pin ashleep? I am fery annoyed—I haf not shlept; I haf reflected; I haf pin shtill in loafe mit te lady; and you, mein gut frent, you must not loafe her ein leedle pit; you haf bromised."

"No, monsieur le baron, I am not at all in love with Madame Dauberny. Make love to her, if you will; I shall not be your rival."

"Gif me your hand, mein frent."

"But it's very late; let us go."

"I vould vish to say gut night to te lady; to say to her tat I haf not shleep."

"You can come another time and tell her that. She has gone to her room, and to bed probably; she would not see you. Come!"

I succeeded at last, with much difficulty, in inducing the baron to leave the place. When we reached the street, he himself asked me to get into his carriage, and

insisted on taking me home. But we were no sooner seated than his head fell back heavily against the cushions and he slept once more. I told the coachman to drive to his master's hôtel, where he and the footman undertook to take him up to his apartment.

I returned on foot to my lodgings. The fresh air always does one good after a banquet at which one has not been abstemious; and then, too, I have always loved to be out late in Paris. It is so easy to walk, and the noisy, bustling city wears such a different aspect! Everything is quiet and deserted. You may walk through the most frequented streets, the most populous quarters, as if you were strolling on the outer boulevards. No carriages to block your way; no itinerant hucksters to deafen you with their yells; no passers-by to elbow you; no awnings, no stands outside of shop doors for you to run into; no dogs to run between your legs; no horses to splash mud on you; no concierges to sweep their gutters onto your boots. Vive Paris at night! especially since the streets have been lighted by gas, so that one can see as well as at noonday.

XXIV

COQUETRY AND BACCARAT.—A FIASCO

A week had passed since the unique night I had spent at Madame Dauberny's. I had respected that lady's orders and had made no attempt to see her; I had simply left my card with her concierge.

When the image of *my friend Frédérique* presented itself to my mind, I exerted myself to banish it without pity; it seemed to me that my supper in her apartments was a dream, which it was not necessary that I should remember.

For several days, too, I had felt strongly inclined not to call again on Madame Sordeville. But, before renouncing my hopes in that direction altogether, I determined to go to her house once more. If she received me coldly a second time, I swore that I would not try to see her again.

One fine day, after making a careful toilet,—which always made my servant Pomponne smile, for he was bent on considering himself very sly,—I presented myself at the door of the pretty brunette, whose hair, by the way, was not so beautiful as her friend Frédérique's; but we cannot have everything.

"Madame is at home," said the concierge.

I went upstairs, gave my name, and was admitted to madame's boudoir, a charming sanctuary, the divinity of which was sure to attract many of the faithful.

I was greeted with the most gracious smile imaginable; she reproached me most kindly for having left her so long without a glimpse of me. Never had Armantine looked

lovelier to me, and her amiability was delightful. I found once more my partner of the ball at Deffieux's.

I passed an hour at Madame Sordeville's, and at the end of the hour it seemed to me that I had just arrived. What did I say to her? I have no idea; but I think that I squeezed her hand more than once, and that it did not seem to offend her. I went so far as to put her hand to my lips; she withdrew it, and said in a tone in which there was no trace of severity:

"Well, well! what are you doing? what are you thinking about?"

"You, nothing but you."

"Oh! pardon me if I do not believe you! When one thinks so much of people, one doesn't go whole weeks without seeing them."

"When those people have received us with icy coldness, is it not natural that we should hesitate before venturing to present ourselves again?"

"Coldness! Ought I to have taken your hand, made you sit down beside me, and talked exclusively with you all the evening?"

"Oh! you are laughing at me, madame! You are well aware that, even in a crowd, before witnesses, there are a thousand ways of pouring balm on a suffering, anxious heart; a word, a glance, is enough."

"But, monsieur, such words and glances are almost signs of a mutual understanding, and are only exchanged by persons who know each other very well, who are sure of each other."

I kissed her hand. That time she made no objection and did not withdraw it; but she faltered:

"You are so impulsive! I begin to think that a tête-à-tête with you is very dangerous."

"And you will not receive me again?"

"I didn't say that."

"And you will permit me to love you?"

"If I should forbid you to, would you obey me?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then you see that I may as well permit it."

"And I may hope?"

"Ah! I didn't say that!"

"But you will not say anything!"

"I am not so quick as you.—By the way, I did have something to say to you. The other evening, you went away with Madame Dauberny, I believe. Did you escort her home? That would be very natural, as my friend was of such great assistance to you at the Guillardin ball that you should be polite to her."

I did not know what to say; I was uncertain whether Frédérique wanted it known that she had invited us to supper. In that uncertainty, it seemed to me more becoming to say nothing about that episode; one never repents having been discreet.

"I escorted Madame Dauberny to her door," I replied, after a moment, "and left her there."

"Ah! that is strange! It took you a long time to tell me that!"

"Because—I had forgotten."

"Indeed! Frédérique is so original—so disdainful of conventionalities sometimes, that I had thought——"

"What, pray?"

"But, no, that would have been contrary to all the proprieties! To be sure, she snaps her fingers at them."

"But what was it that you thought?"

"Nothing; or, rather, I don't choose to tell you."

"You must have seen your friend often since that evening?"

"Only once. I have no idea what she is doing now. She is hardly ever seen in society. She probably has something to keep her busy. Saint-Bergame must be replaced. For you know, I suppose, that they have quarrelled? Frédérique is not in the habit of remaining unengaged. Before Saint-Bergame there was another, and before him another, and another. She loves variety."

I admire the way women abuse their intimate friends! At that moment, I wondered what they would say when they spoke of their enemies; the difference could hardly be perceptible.—And so Madame Dauberny had had a large number of weaknesses! She had never had a serious attachment! That was a pity; and it surprised me; for it seemed to me that she was just the woman to inspire one.

I do not know what I should have said in reply to Madame Sordeville's remark, but a visitor arrived: a lady of uncertain age, almost lost in gauze and lace and veils, which were heaped upon her head and hung down about her body. I fancied that I had a cloud before me, or one of Isabey's pictures, minus the beautiful coloring. I surrendered my place to that atmospheric personage, and took my leave. Madame Sordeville made me promise to attend her next reception, and honored me with a glance that filled my soul with joy.

I left the house, as light as a feather. I did not walk, I fairly bounded. Pleasure transformed me into a goat; I longed to dance. You will consider, doubtless, that I was very childish, and that a man who had had so many amorous adventures should have been more blasé; you are entirely wrong, for I was blasé in no respect; my last

bonne fortune made me as happy as the first of all. That was a dispensation of Providence in my favor, for blasé people have two drawbacks: they do not enjoy themselves, and they bore their friends.

Pomponne smiled again when I reached home; that fellow was not such a fool as I supposed: he read my face very well indeed.

I waited impatiently for the Thursday which was to give me an opportunity to see the charming Armantine once more. I had thought of nothing else since my call upon her; she was so affable and expansive that day, that I believed that the moment of my happiness could not be very distant. She had received the avowal of my love without indignation; nay, she had seemed to listen to it with pleasure; she had abandoned her hand to me and let me put it to my lips; and, but for that inopportune visitor, who could say that I should not have obtained more? No matter! it seemed that I was fairly justified in hoping.

Thursday arrived in due course. Pomponne was ordered to surpass himself in dressing my hair; I do not know whether he succeeded, but I do know that he pulled my hair for half an hour; so that he made my head extremely sore. But I did not scold him. I dressed with my eye on the clock. I longed to be there, but I said to myself that it was more adroit to make her wait a little—and I had no doubt that she was waiting for me.

The moment came at last. I set out with my heart full of Armantine's image. I arrived at her door. I remembered that in society one must wear a mask, so that one's secret thoughts may not be divined. But that mask embarrassed me; I could hardly endure it.

There were a good many people there before me. So much the better, I thought. The more numerous the

company, the greater one's freedom of action. Monsieur Sordeville greeted me warmly, shook my hand, and reproached me for not coming to their little receptions for several weeks. His excessive amiability should have made me remorseful; but I had never had the slightest liking for the man; and, in any event, why did he neglect his wife?

I succeeded in approaching her for whose sake, and that alone, I had come. She greeted me most graciously; but when I tried to exchange with her one of those glances which are far more eloquent than empty words, I could not meet her eye. She had turned to a young man who had just been presented to her, and received his compliments with a profusion of little smirks and grimaces, which were very pretty, perhaps, but which I considered sadly out of place at that moment. I flattered myself, however, that my turn would come; that she had not forgotten that I was there, within a few feet. But lo! the fair-haired youth of the other evening, Monsieur Mondival, came up and entered into conversation with her; the fellow must have said something very amusing, to make her laugh so heartily! But Madame Dauberny had assured me that the man was stupid, and I relied upon her judgment. Next, a tall man, with black beard, whiskers, and moustaches, came to pay his respects to the mistress of the house. She greeted him with a smile, playing with her fan; their conversation seemed likely to be protracted, and I began to grow weary of waiting for my turn. I walked away, presumably with a very long face; and to cap the climax of my woes, I almost ran into the arms of the gentleman who kept his eyes almost closed, but who saw well enough to recognize me, and entered into conversation with me.

I have no idea what answer I made. I turned my back on him, for he bored me beyond words. I watched the whist players for a while, but soon returned to the salon where Armantine was, saying to myself:

"It can't go on like this; if she laughs with others, there is no reason why she shouldn't laugh with me; I am a fool not to stand my ground."

And I approached Madame Sordeville, who was talking with a lady. Suddenly she turned toward me and burst out laughing.

"Mon Dieu! what on earth is the matter with you to-night, Monsieur Rochebrune? What a horrible face you are making! Have you the toothache?"

When one is already in an ill temper, and is trying to conceal it, there is nothing more maddening than to have someone ask what the matter is; the result is that, instead of simply looking unhappy, you make a grimace; and that is probably what I did, for Armantine restrained with difficulty a longing to laugh again, while I muttered, biting my lips:

"The matter, madame? Why, nothing. What do you suppose is the matter? I have never had the toothache."

"Monsieur," said a tall, thin old woman, who was sitting beside Madame Sordeville, and had, I suppose, heard my last words, "put in some cotton soaked in eau de Cologne. Soak the cotton thoroughly and put it in the tooth. It's an excellent remedy, I assure you! It doesn't take away the pain at once, but, after a few days, you suffer much less."

"But, madame," I said to the old lady who insisted upon my having the toothache, "I have not complained, I am not in pain! I don't know why you insist that——"

"Then, monsieur," she continued, paying no heed to me, "you have another remedy, bay salt. Two or three grains of it produce saliva; you spit, and take more salt, and keep on till the pain is relieved."

I saw that Madame Sordeville was laughing heartily at the impatience with which I listened to the old lady, who continued:

"Above all things, monsieur, don't have them extracted! Oh! keep your teeth, monsieur! keep them, by all means! You no sooner have them taken out than you regret them. I myself, monsieur, have lost fourteen, and I am in despair to-day! I feel that something is lacking. Of course, I know that one can——"

I had had enough. Something more was to be lacking to that lady; to wit, myself as a listener for the entire evening. I had not come there to attend a course of lectures on dentistry. It seemed to me that Armantine was laughing at me while I was having that consultation about my teeth. She had gone to the piano, meanwhile, and the concert began. If it was to be as fine a performance as on the previous evening, the prospect was captivating. I felt inclined to find fault with everything. Now that the music was under way, it would be hard for me to talk to Armantine; she either accompanied, or turned the pages for singers and players. In short, she devoted herself to everybody, except myself. So I had encouraged myself with a false hope! She did not love me—and yet, how charming she was only three days before! Did she not let me squeeze her hand and kiss it? Did she not smile at my declaration of love? Suppose that she ostentatiously treated me coldly before the world, only to conceal more effectually the sentiments I inspired? I grasped at that idea, because it left me some

hope. Moreover, if it were not so, Madame Sordeville was a downright coquette, who had been making sport of me and would do it again! I preferred to believe that she was dissembling her love; if so, she dissembled perfectly.

The Baron von Brunzbrack entered the salon and came up to me:

"Ponshour, mein gut frent Rocheprune!"

"Good-evening, monsieur le baron!"

"Do you know if Montame Dauberny vill come to tis barty?"

"I have no idea; I have not seen her since we three were together."

"Ach! you haf not seen her."

And the baron pressed my hand with new warmth.

"So id is mit me. I haf pin often to bay mein resbects, put te lady, she haf pin always oud. Haf you pin to see her?"

"No; I have left my card, nothing more."

"Ach! gut, gut! you pe not in loafe mit her shtill?"

"What, baron! are you still harping on that idea? How many times must I tell you that I have never made love to Madame Dauberny, that I have never thought of doing it?"

"Ach! ja! ja! You pe in loafe mit anoder. I haf forgot."

The baron could not understand how anybody could fail to make love to Madame Dauberny, and I could not understand how Madame Sordeville could allow everybody to make love to her; in love, each of us has his own way of looking at things.

Suddenly Brunzbrack seized my arm as if he meant to tear it from its socket. I thought that he had an attack

of hysteria; but, as I saw Madame Dauberny enter the salon at that moment, I understood what had caused his convulsive movement.

Frédérique wore an original costume, as indeed she generally did. A black velvet gown, high in the neck, fitted closely to her figure, which seemed more than ordinarily slender; her hair was dressed with sprays of jet and black velvet bows, and that severe style gave to her face, which was unusually pale, a serious expression. I did not know whether I ought still to be angry with her; I remembered the decidedly brusque way in which she had dismissed me, but in the next moment I remembered all the confidence and friendship she had shown me. While I hesitated, trying to make up my mind, Frédérique passed us, and bowed coolly enough to us both.

Brunzbrack left me, to dog the steps of the woman he adored, and I continued to prowl about Armantine. We were both playing the same game. Should we have luck? Up to that time, I had seen no prospect of it.

Monsieur Mondival sang several ballads; he sang them precisely as a schoolboy repeats his lessons; but as the ballads themselves were amusing, the company laughed heartily, and the singer attributed it to his own performance, whereas his only merit was his skilful choice of songs.

After he had finished, the black-bearded man, who had talked a long while with Armantine, seated himself at the piano, and sang a grand aria with infinitely more assurance than voice. But assurance is a great thing in society. He was loudly applauded, and when he left the piano I was certain that Madame Sordeville complimented

him. If I chose—one thing was certain, that I had a better voice than that man.

All this irritated me; I was intensely annoyed to find that she paid no attention to me, and I went to the piano and began to turn over the music. But she observed my movements sufficiently to see that I was there, for she came to me and said:

"It's a great pity that you sing only when you are alone; for I should have been delighted to hear you, monsieur."

"Mon Dieu! if it will give you any pleasure, madame——"

"You will sing? How good of you!"

"I will try to sing something. I don't know whether I can manage it."

"Oh! that is an amateur's modesty! I am sure that you sing beautifully."

She walked quickly to a seat, saying:

"Monsieur Rochebrune is going to sing. Silence, if you please!"

Everyone ceased talking, and the room became perfectly still. I began to be afraid that I had gone too fast. To be sure, I sing rather well, but it so rarely happens that I sing before strangers. However, I realized that I must do my best; it was impossible to back out.

I sat down at the piano. My fingers refused to move. What was I to sing? I must make up my mind, for everybody was waiting. I settled upon a romanza by Massini; as is usually the case when one is afraid, I selected the most difficult piece I knew and the one that I sang least well.

At the outset, I forgot the accompaniment and struck two or three discordant notes in the bass—something that

had never happened to me before. That was calculated to give my hearers rather a sorry idea of my musical organization.

When I came to the second verse, I forgot the words. I stopped, and began again; but it was of no use, and I mumbled between my teeth:

"Tradera, deri, dera!"

The words of the third verse came to me all right, and I determined to be revenged for the mess I had made of the other two. I attacked it with confidence, and when I came to an *ad libitum* passage I risked a note which I had taken a hundred times without any trouble. But I had something in my throat that night. Was it fear? was it ill humor? This much is certain, that I made a vile fiasco, and that I ended my song coughing as if I had swallowed something the wrong way.

I left the piano, purple with chagrin, and still coughing. Somebody was malicious enough to applaud me; but I saw in the eyes of the guests that malignant joy which people always feel in society when they have a fair opportunity to laugh at somebody. What distressed me most of all was that I had made an ass of myself before Armantine, who was much given to raillery, and who could hardly restrain her laughter; while Herr von Brunzbrack said to me with the utmost good faith:

"Vat a bity tat you haf ein cold! Id vas going so vell!"

I made no reply; I would have liked to crawl under a sofa. I slunk away to a corner of the salon, where I heard a voice in my ear:

"That false note puts you back at least three months!"

Frédérique was behind me. I understood her meaning perfectly. In truth, in the eyes of a vain, coquettish

woman like Madame Sordeville, to make one's self ridiculous before witnesses is a great crime! There are so few women who love us for ourselves! With the great majority we owe our success solely to all the previous successes we have had.

I took refuge in the card room. Fredérique followed me there and organized a game of baccarat, with herself as banker. The stakes were high, and she won from everybody, until she had a pile of gold in front of her. Herr von Brunzbrack had lost all the money that he had with him; but that did not disturb him: he tried to obtain a word, even a glance, from the superb banker; but to no purpose, she paid no attention to him. After a time, in my effort to distract my thoughts, I took my turn against Madame Dauberny, who played with perfect tranquillity, utterly indifferent to her good fortune, and did not deign to notice the laments or the ogling of those whom she had despoiled.

"Ah! so you are going to play," she said to me, in a bantering tone. "Indeed, you are very wise, for, if the proverb is to be depended on, you will be very lucky to-night. But proverbs take the liberty of lying sometimes—poor Baron von Brunzbrack is a living example. If anyone ought to win, he is the man! And yet, I have ruined him as well as all the others. Come, monsieur, let us play, let us play! I shall not be sorry to vanquish you also."

It seemed to me that there was an ironical tone in Madame Dauberny's voice, which was not usual with her. I remembered what her friend had told me as to the numerous lovers who had succeeded one another in her heart; if I chose to be sarcastic, there were many things I might say to her by way of retort. But, no—I was conscious of an indefinable feeling of sympathy

with that woman. I loved her—not with love; it was rather friendship, confidence, which drew me toward her. Why, in heaven's name, did I steal that kiss while she was asleep? But, on the other hand, why did she keep changing her coiffure, and make herself so alluring, so seductive? A woman ought not to try such experiments, even on a man who is in love with her friend.

I placed some gold in front of me, and began to play. I won; I doubled my stake, and won again; I continued on the same line, and won incessantly. But after a few moments Frédérique seemed to be inattentive to her game; I noticed that she glanced frequently and with evident impatience toward her left: Monsieur Sordeville was there, talking confidentially with the Baron von Brunzbrack. Suddenly my banker interrupted the game and cried, turning to the two men:

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Sordeville, do let that poor baron alone for a moment; he comes here to amuse himself, and you compel him to talk to you about the affairs of his government! Really, you abuse your position as host; it is not generous."

Monsieur Sordeville became dumb; his lips blanched, but he forced himself to smile, and replied, after a brief interval:

"In truth, madame, I was ill-advised to converse with one of my guests; it is robbing you of an adorer."

"Come and play, baron," said Madame Dauberny, making no reply to Monsieur Sordeville's compliment.

The baron came to the table with a blissful air, crying:

"I vould like noding petter, but I haf not ein sou."

"You may play on credit, monsieur; you are one of those men whose honor is evident to all, and of whom no one ventures to speak slightingly."

The baron bowed; he was radiant with joy. It seemed to me that there was a hidden meaning in Madame Dauberny's last words, and that they were accompanied with a glance at Monsieur Sordeville, who did not stir.

The baron seated himself by my side. I offered to lend him money; he accepted, and in a short time we broke the bank. Thereupon the fair Frédérique gravely rose and left the table, saying:

"Faith! the proverb did not lie; it was written that you should both win."

"Are you going, montame?"

"Yes, baron."

"Vill you not bermit me to escord you in my carriage?"

"No, not to-night."

"Monsir Rocheprune, he vill come mit us."

"Thanks; but I do not care for an escort to-night. Nights succeed one another, but do not resemble one another."

Frédérique took her departure, leaving the baron discomfited. I returned to Madame Sordeville, as I was determined to speak to her before I went away. I saw that she was alone, so I hastened to her side and told her how happy I should be if I could see her again soon and tell her of my love, without witnesses. She listened with a distraught, indifferent air; and when I thought that she was about to reply, she cried:

"Dear me! they haven't served the tea yet, and it's after twelve!"

And she left me. I stood for a moment as if rooted to the floor. I could not understand the caprice, the coquetry, the bewildering changes, in Armantine's treatment of me. I asked myself if a false note could have

caused it all; and if so, what reliance was to be placed upon a lady's favor. I concluded that it would be well for me to go away. At that moment, the tall, thin woman who had previously spoken to me accosted me again:

"When your teeth ache too badly, monsieur, you can fill them yourself. I'll show you how. Come and sit here."

I had no desire to hear any more, and turned and fled while she was seating herself in a convenient position to show me how one can fill one's own teeth.

XXV

A YOUNG MOTHER

Three months had passed, and I had not tried to see Madame Sordeville again. However, her image had not faded from my heart; on the contrary, she was constantly in my thoughts, and I imagined her as amiable and fascinating as on the first day that I saw her. So that I was not cured of my passion for that lady, although I had sufficient self-control not to call upon her again. To my mind, it was perfectly natural to love a person who did not love me; that is something that happens every day; but I did not understand how any man could consent to act as laughing stock to a coquette. One must needs try to retain a certain amount of dignity; to forget one's dignity is not the way to win love. When, burning with desire to see Armantine, I was on the point of forgetting my resolutions and running to throw myself at her feet, I remembered how she had left me abruptly, to

attend to her tea, without a word in reply to what I had said to her.

I had not once met Madame Dauberny, and I regretted more deeply every day the loss of that strange creature's friendship. It was so novel to be *thou'd* by a woman whose lover I had never been. At least, it was a change, a departure from common custom. And then, she had given me her confidence so unreservedly! Why had I sacrificed all that by a moment's forgetfulness?

But, after all, I considered that Frédérique had treated me very harshly. She might well have scolded me, have made me understand my mistake, without breaking off all relations with me on the spot. The idea of being so angry about a kiss! It was a most extraordinary thing, for that is one of the offences which the sex readily forgives. And then, there were so many extenuating circumstances! The supper, the champagne, the hour! And that hair of hers, which she arranged in a different way every minute!

It was the end of February, and the cold was still very sharp, when, on one of those keen, bracing mornings that invite one to walk, I happened to remember Mignonne Landernoy. Poor girl! How could I have forgotten her so long, and all for a coquette who certainly did not give a thought to me! I determined to repair my neglect at once. I enveloped myself in a heavy coat, put a comforter around my neck, and started for Rue Ménilmontant.

As I walked along, I recalled Mignonne's plight when I saw her in November; I thought of all that must have happened since then, and I was conscious of nothing but an eager desire to have news of the young woman. I quickened my pace, and at last found myself in front

of the concierge's door. She was surrounded by cats, as on the occasion of my first visit.

At sight of a man enveloped in a heavy coat with the collar turned up, and with his face almost entirely hidden by a comforter, Madame Potrelle sat up in her chair and took one of the cats in her right hand as if to hurl it at my head.

"What do you want, monsieur?" she cried, with an imposing air; "what does this mean? Do people come into other people's houses disguised like that? Unmask yourself, monsieur; I don't answer masks, I tell you!"

I removed my comforter, and could not refrain from laughing at the concierge's alarm, as I said:

"Are comforters unknown in your quarter, madame? It seems to be quite as cold here as it is where I came from."

The good woman uttered an exclamation of surprise, for she recognized me; thereupon she placed on the stove the cat she had seized in lieu of a pistol, which instantly vanished. I stepped into the lodge.

"What! is it you, monsieur? *Pardine!* I remember you now! You're the young man with the shirts."

"The same, madame; it was I who left with you some work for—Madame Landernoy."

"And a letter; yes, yes! Oh! I recognize you. But I couldn't see anything but your eyes just now, and, you see, that startled me at first. Well! you've taken your time about coming to get your shirts; anybody can see you ain't in a hurry!"

"Tell me about that poor young woman."

"She's pretty well, although she works awful hard. You see, she has to work for two now! She was confined more than two months ago; she's got a little girl, a sweet, pretty little thing."

"Ah! so much the better! And the child is with her?"

"Yes, to be sure; oh! there's no danger of her parting with the child; she nurses her herself, and never leaves her a minute; she's so afraid something'll happen to her, that she'll cry or need her care, that she wont let her out of her sight a single minute. When she goes out to buy her provisions, she carries her in her arms. Sometimes I say to her: 'Why, Madame Landernoy'—I never call her anything but *madame* now—'why, Madame Landernoy,' I says, 'just leave your child here with me; I'll look after little Marie while you do your errands, and you can go much quicker if you don't have her to carry.'—But she won't do it. I believe, God forgive me! that she's afraid my cats will hurt the child; but they ain't capable of it, monsieur; I've brought 'em up too well for that. They're playful and sly—that's because they're young, and we've all been young; but as for bad temper and clawing, I never saw any signs of it in 'em."

"I see that Madame Landernoy loves her daughter dearly."

"Love her! why, her daughter's her life, her thought, her heart! Ah! my word! it would be a pity not to have a child, when one's such a good mother!"

"You are right, madame; children are a burden only to those who do not know how to love them! Did the young mother consent finally to accept the work I left with you?"

"Yes, monsieur. At first, when she read your letter—she read it here in my lodge—she shook her head like a person who ain't quite convinced. What can you expect? she's suspicious, poor girl! Well! just hear me call her a girl, will you! what a stupid! The poor woman has good cause for that. A scalded cat's afraid

of cold water—mine all are; I can punish 'em more, monsieur, by throwing two or three drops of water in their faces than if I took a stick to 'em."

"You were saying that when Madame Landernoy read my letter she did not seem fully convinced of the honesty of my intentions?"

"There was a little doubt left in her mind; but then she says: 'I may as well do this work, as that gentleman will come here to get it.'"

"So that my shirts are done?"

"Yes, monsieur; they've been here more'n five weeks, with the little bill; and in the last few days Madame Landernoy's asked me two or three times if you'd been or sent anybody to get your shirts—because, I guess—just now—— *Dame!* monsieur, work ain't always very plenty, you understand; and now that she's got a child, she has to have a stove in her room, because she don't want her daughter to take cold."

"I understand, madame; I am very, very sorry that I delayed so about coming. Give me the bill at once."

"Take your shirts first and see how well they're done! Such sewing! it's perfect!"

The concierge had taken a parcel from her commode; but I pushed it away, saying:

"I am sure they are well done. But the bill, the bill!"

"I'll give it to you, monsieur. I'm sorry you won't look at your shirts. Here's the bill—yes, that's it."

I looked to see what I owed, and read:

"For making twelve shirts—twenty-seven francs."

I put my hand in my pocket, and sighed.

"Twenty-seven francs!" I muttered.

"*Dame!* yes, at forty-five sous the shirt," said the concierge, hearing the sigh. "Do you think that's too much?"

"No, madame; on the contrary, I think that it's not enough. The young woman must spend at least two days making a shirt, doesn't she?"

"I should think so! Say three, and you'll be nearer the mark."

"So that, by working constantly, and robbing herself of sleep perhaps,—for she has a child that often requires her attention,—the poor woman would earn only fifteen sous a day. Can she live, board and clothe herself, and keep herself warm, on fifteen sous?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, it ain't every woman who sews for a living as earns that. But then, as you say, they can't live, and they're obliged to—to do something else."

"If I should have these shirts made at a shop, madame, I should have to pay at least three francs each. I am not a tradesman myself, and I don't care to make money out of a workwoman. Twelve shirts at three francs makes thirty-six francs which I owe Madame Landernoy. Be kind enough to hand it to her for me."

I held out the money to the concierge, who did not take it, because she was wiping her eyes. My action seemed to her very meritorious, and yet it was no more than just.

"You are a very good man, monsieur," she said at last, in a tearful voice; "if everybody thought as you do, seamstresses could live and we should see fewer poor wretches on the streets at night. But still, I don't know whether I ought to take the sum you offer me."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because the little woman's so proud in her poverty. She'll say: 'He only owed me twenty-seven francs, and you ought not to have taken any more.'"

"You can explain to her that it's the price I always pay."

"Oh, yes! but that won't seem right to her. *Dame!* what can you expect? She's suspicious, as I told you. And, worse luck! people do so few—honest things in these days——"

"You must remind her that her daughter may need a thousand things."

"Oh, yes! I know; that's where I shall have to catch her. Well, I'll keep what you give me; and I can give it back if she won't take it."

"She must take it! But that is not all, madame; has she much work at this moment?"

"I don't think so; so this money'll come in very handy."

"That isn't enough; it will soon be spent."

"The deuce! how fast you go! My, thirty-six francs is a lot of money!"

"I would like to give Madame Landernoy other work to do."

"But you can't go on having shirts made forever."

"Mon Dieu! what can I give her? Ah! does she make waistcoats?"

"I believe she tried one for the landlord's little boy; but they said it was a failure. Still, that little fellow's terrible hard to suit; he had his cap made over five times, and finally swore he'd have a three-cornered hat! He's so spoiled that he's unreasonable. But just let him try again to set my cats fighting!"

"Then it's understood, madame, that I am to buy some material for waistcoat fronts, which I will bring you, together with a pattern, and you are to give the work to Madame Landernoy to do, and tell her not to worry; that her customer isn't exacting, that I am having them made for someone in the country."

The concierge dropped her cats to shake hands with me.

"I understand you, monsieur," she said; "you're afraid the young mother won't have work enough; you mean to give her work, by hook or by crook. You're interested in her, and I'll bet that she makes a mistake to suspicion you. Oh! I know what's what, I do; I can scent one of those empty-headed puppies who comes to talk nonsense, when he's a mile away! They don't go about it the way you do; they slip a piece of money in my hand, with a little note that smells of musk and hair oil, and then they examine the house and the yard and the windows as if they meant to break in. I know 'em, I know 'em!"

"No, Madame Potrelle, I am not a lover—here, at all events."

"*Pardi!* I can understand that you may be, somewhere else. It would be a pity if you didn't think about such things, at your age."

"I will go and buy the material and bring it to you."

"But that will give you the trouble of coming back again, monsieur. If you want, I can save you that. My niece happens to be here just now, and she can look out for my lodge while I go to monsieur's address; and I'll tell you at the same time whether Madame Landernoy consents to take the thirty-six francs."

Something told me that the woman had some hidden reason for making that suggestion. I fancied that she desired to come to my lodgings, so that she might find out more about me and be certain that I had given my own name in my letter to Mignonne; indeed, might it not be that the young mother herself had asked her to try to find out who I was?

As I had nothing to fear from such information as Madame Potrelle could collect about me, I accepted her proposal.

"Here is my address," I said, handing her one of my cards. "Be there in two hours, and I shall have made my purchases. Please be good enough to bring me my shirts at the same time."

"With pleasure, monsieur!"

Madame Potrelle was prompt; I had been at home only a few minutes, when Pomponne appeared and said with comic gravity:

"There's a woman outside asking for you, monsieur. She has something in her apron, and a parcel under her arm. I suppose she's a second-hand dealer who wants to sell you something."

"Hold your tongue, Pomponne, and show her in!"

My servant obeyed my order, although he seemed much puzzled that I received in my salon a person whom he evidently considered unworthy of the honor; and he kept his eye on the object which the concierge held to her breast, wrapped in her apron. I motioned to him to withdraw, and he left the room, walking backward.

Madame Potrelle made a succession of reverences, and handed me my shirts, which she had under her arm, wrapped in a handkerchief. The good woman expressed her admiration of my apartments and their furnishings; which goes to show that opulence always produces its effect on the multitude and on private individuals as well. I tried to put her at her ease, and forced her to sit down in an easy-chair; but she continued to hug her apron to her breast, and it seemed to embarrass her.

At last she partly opened the apron, saying:

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, for venturing to bring him here—but he never goes out, poor dear, and I thought it would do him good."

"What do you mean, Madame Potrelle? have you got a child in there?"

"No, monsieur, no; it's one of my cats, Bribri, the youngest one. The others let him be and won't ever play with him, just because he limps a bit, poor little rascal! He's got a little trouble in his leg. Cats are as bad as men; they turn up their noses at the weak ones! That's why I wanted to give the poor dear a little pleasure."

"You did well, Madame Potrelle; let Bribri run about a little, if you wish."

"You see, monsieur, my cats are well brought up; they ain't capable of forgetting themselves, no matter where they be."

"I am sure of it."

The concierge opened her apron entirely, and a small black and white cat escaped from its folds and scuttled under a piece of furniture.

"Well," I said, "have you seen Madame Landernoy?"

"Yes, monsieur; when she found out that you'd given me more money than she'd put in her bill, she wouldn't take it, and she almost got mad with me. It was no use for me to say: 'The gentleman always pays that price;' she said that didn't make any difference to her. The only way I could make her take the money was to tell her that you had other work for her to do and she could let it go on that.—Well! on my word! there he is on the couch now! Bribri! you mustn't get upon that, you scamp!"

"We will see, when it comes to paying for the waistcoats. Poor girl! what noble pride! what an upright soul! And this is the sort of woman that men take pleasure in defiling!"

"What do you say, monsieur?"

"Nothing, Madame Potrelle. Here are the material, the linings, and the pattern. Take them all, and please accept this for your trouble."

I slipped five francs into the concierge's hand; she made some objection to taking it, declaring that whatever she did for her tenant she did unselfishly. I succeeded without too much difficulty in removing her scruples. She took the material; but the next thing was to capture Bribri, who had established himself under a sofa and refused to come out at all, or came out only to run under something else. It seemed to me that he showed much agility for a cripple.

Madame Potrelle made the circuit of my salon several times on all fours. At last, by rolling a ball of paper across the floor, we succeeded in enticing and catching Bribri, whom his mistress replaced in her apron, saying reprovingly:

"You ain't been a good boy; you shan't go out again for six weeks.—Adieu, monsieur! you havent got any other word to send to my tenant?"

"Tell her that I am very fond of children, and that I would like to kiss her daughter."

"Ah! if she could hear you, monsieur, I'll bet that she'd hold her little Marie up to you right away. But you won't let three months go by without coming again, will you, monsieur?"

"No, Madame Potrelle; I shall come very soon to hear about Madame Landernoy."

"And I'll tell her, monsieur, that you're an excellent young man—because—anyone can see right away that—— Well! if the little rascal ain't swearing now! Ah! catch me taking you to walk again!"

I dismissed the concierge, who went away without giving Pomponne a chance to see what she had under her apron. He was thunderstruck.

XXVI

THE SQUIRREL

As I was about to leave the house, Pomponne handed me a card; it was Balloquet's. He had been several times to see me and had failed to find me. I was ashamed of my discourteous treatment of that young man, to whom I was indebted for my acquaintance with Armantine and Frédérique. It was not his fault if nothing had come of that acquaintance, neither love nor friendship. I was very sure that he had been more fortunate than I, and that the liaison he had begun at Monsieur Bocal's party had led to something. But there was no reason why I should not convince myself of the fact, and I determined to pay Balloquet a visit.

I betook myself to the young physician's abode on Place Bréda. Balloquet had established himself there in the hope of obtaining patients among the lorettes. He considered that with such a clientage his fortune was assured. He had my best wishes, but it was not medicine that he practised with those ladies.

As I was entering the house in which lived my jovial companion of the night of the weddings, the concierge stopped me.

"Where is monsieur going?"

"To see Monsieur Balloquet, physician."

"He has not lived here for two months, monsieur."

"His address, if you please?"

"Rue d'Amsterdam, No. 42, near the railroad station."

To Rue d'Amsterdam I went. It seemed that Balloquet had not obtained the practice that he hoped for among the lorettes; perhaps he had decided to be a railroad doctor—that is to say, to be on hand to attend to arriving and departing travellers. That would not be a bad idea.

I arrived at No. 42. It was a handsome house, and quite new, naturally enough, as the street was new. I asked for Dr. Balloquet. The concierge pointed to a staircase at the rear of the courtyard:

"Top floor, door facing you. He must be in."

The top floor was at least the fifth. It seemed to me that it must be a bad thing for a doctor to live so far up. Some of the patients who came to consult him would certainly find it hard work to climb so high. Probably Balloquet loved fresh air, and made more visits than he received.

The hall was quite light and very clean and neat; but I had to climb six flights of stairs before I reached the top landing. I got there at last, and found the name of Balloquet, with his professional title, on a little card nailed to the door that faced me. It occurred to me that a copper plate would be better. I thought that I remembered that he had a very fine one at his other lodgings; probably he was having it changed.

I pulled a dilapidated tassel, which had at one time done duty on a curtain. The bell rang shrilly, but nobody opened the door. Perhaps the apartment was

very large. I rang again, but nobody appeared. Still, the concierge had said:

"He must be in."

I tried another method. Sometimes young men dread a woman's visit, especially when they have another woman with them. I coughed in several keys, and in a moment the door opened a little way and Balloquet's nose appeared. When he spied me, he threw the door wide open, crying:

"Why, it's my dear Rochebrune! Come in, my dear fellow, come in! That was a good idea of yours, to cough. I was apprehensive of other visits."

"A doctor doesn't ordinarily fear them."

"That depends on what kind they are."

"Perhaps you have company, and I disturb you?"

"Not at all. I am alone. Come in."

I passed through a very small room, in which I did not see a single piece of furniture, into a large bedroom with an iron bed, a desk, chairs, two trunks, and a small bookcase. Clothes and toilet articles were scattered about on all the furniture and in every corner. If picturesque disorder is the result of an artistic temperament, it is impossible to be more artistic than Balloquet, who offered me a chair, saying, as he removed the dressing gown in which he was wrapped:

"I'll go back to bed, with your permission?"

"Certainly; but you lie in bed very late; are you ill?"

"Not now; but I've had a hard time."

"You are changed, that is true. Where is your fine coloring, and the fresh complexion that procured you so many soft glances?"

"Oh! as to my fresh complexion, I have lost that entirely; but it will come back. It's infernally cold here!"

"That is true."

"Come nearer the fireplace."

"I haven't the slightest objection, but how will that help me? There's no fire."

"No fire! Gad! that's so. I remember now that I didn't find a single stick this morning in that trunk that I use as a woodbox; indeed, that's why I stayed in bed, because it was warmer here. Will you get into bed with me, without ceremony?"

"No, thanks; I prefer to be cold. But, tell me, Balloquet, what in the deuce has happened to you since I saw you last? Then you had a very pretty little suite of rooms, handsomely furnished; you had everything you wanted, and a fellow didn't freeze in your room; and to-day you are perched on a sixth floor, in a single room; for I don't see any other than the one I entered, and this is evidently the whole apartment."

"Yes; but how beautifully it's decorated, eh? Fresh paint, and this wall paper, and that ceiling with a centre-piece!"

"Yes, yes, it's all fresh and new; for all that, I should think that you'd need some furniture."

"Do you think so? For my part, when an apartment has pretty wall paper and fresh paint, it seems to me that very little furniture is required."

"Very little, possibly, but some; and I didn't see a single piece in the outer room."

"Furniture would make it look smaller, and it's none too large."

I began to laugh, and Balloquet followed suit, rolling himself up in the bedclothes.

"My dear Rochebrune," he continued, "I will conceal the truth from you no longer: you see before you a man who is completely *strapped*—yes, completely!"

"Parbleu! did you suppose that I hadn't discovered it?"

"I'll tell you what has happened to me.—Sapristi! where in the deuce is it? I can't find it, and I must have it."

"What are you looking for under your bedclothes?"

"A friend, a trusty companion, who is of great assistance to me."

"A dog taught to fetch and carry, eh?"

"No, no, it isn't a dog. Ah! here it is!"

And Balloquet produced a little squirrel which he had just captured at the foot of his bed, and which he proceeded to fasten to the back of a chair by a small chain.

"What do you do with that beast?"

"He's a gift from the sentimental Satiné; and he would have gone the way of everything else, but for the fact that he has often helped me out of a scrape."

"That squirrel?"

"Yes, my dear fellow. Perhaps you will have ocular proof of it before long. But let me tell you the story of my misfortunes. I am sorry that you won't get into bed; I'm afraid that you are cold."

"No. Haven't you even a match here?"

"Faith! it's doubtful. Ah, yes! I see three in the corner. Why? have you got some firewood in your pocket?"

"No; but I have some cigars, and I propose to smoke one."

"An excellent idea! smoking keeps you warm. Have you a cigar for friendship?"

"Always."

"I recognize you there!"

"Could Achilles have smoked without Patroclus?"

Balloquet gave me a single match, begging me to be careful of it. I lighted a cigar, and from it he lighted the

one that I gave him. Then he covered himself with the bedclothes, I wrapped myself hermetically in my cloak, and he began:

"The last time I saw you was at the dinner Dupréval gave us, where Fouvenard told us such a villainous story."

"By the way, you were rather intimate with Fouvenard, I think; what is he doing now?"

"I don't know. I never see him. I am very far from being a saint, but his adventure with that poor girl from Sceaux made me detest him."

"Give me your hand, Balloquet; I am glad that you think as I do on that subject. I should have had a very poor opinion of you, if you had continued to be that man's friend. Take another cigar, and go on; I am listening."

"You remember those two famous wedding parties, don't you? I attended Mademoiselle Pétronille Bocal's, where, after some rather lively scrimmages, I became the jewel, the Benjamin of the family, thanks to your arrival with Papa Bocal's landlord. You saw how refreshments were served at that function: punch, mulled wine, and *bischoff* circulating all the time. The women were of all the colors of the rainbow, and so lively and free and easy! the number of glances that were flashed at me was fabulous! but I had cast my spell on a buxom, high-colored brunette, with red roses in her hair."

"I remember your charmer; I saw you talking with her."

"In that case, you see that I don't flatter her. To make a long story short, after supper, during which there was a time when the whole company was fighting because Madame Girie, the groom's mother, swore that she hadn't had the second joint of a chicken that rightfully belonged to her, and that they hadn't given her any truffles when

all the others had some, we left the mother-in-law quarrelling, the father swearing, the groom apologizing, and the bride weeping and tearing her hair, and stole away, my widow and I, in much better spirits than the givers of the feast. But it's almost always like that; *sic vos*—you know the rest.

"My new conquest sold gloves; she had a fine shop on Boulevard des Italiens. No end of style! Mirrors everywhere, violet-wood counter, and an odor of perfumery as soon as you entered the shop! I was in raptures. 'At last, here's a woman who won't cost you anything, and they're very scarce!' I said to myself. In fact, during the first few days, my pretty widow invited me to dine in her back shop. We dined very well, for Madame Satiné likes good things, the delicacies of the season; moreover, she kept me in gloves; as soon as she saw that mine were shabby, she'd say:

"'Fi! fi! what sort of gloves are you wearing? I like to have a man always well gloved; that's the way to recognize a dandy.'

"I let her do as she pleased; I can never refuse a woman anything.

"One day, my loving Satiné, with whom I was dining, said to me:

"'Look you, my little Loquet,'—she always called me by the tail of my name,—'I have an opportunity to make a lot of money.'

"'My dear,' said I, 'you must seize it as you do my name—by the tail.'

"'I know someone who has invented a way of making gloves without seams. They will be splendid; fashionable people won't wear anything else. There's a hundred thousand francs to be made in it.'

"'Somebody once invented seamless boots,' I replied, 'but I don't think he ever made much money, for they didn't take.'

"'Hands aren't like feet. I am sure of the success of this enterprise.'

"'Go on and make your seamless gloves, then.'

"'But I must buy the secret process first, and I can't get it for less than fifteen thousand francs.'

"'That's rather dear for a few less seams.'

"'But with that fifteen thousand francs I shall make a hundred thousand!'

"'Buy the secret, then.'

"'That's what I want to do. A mere trifle prevents me—I haven't any money; but I thought of you. You told me, you know, that it would make you unhappy if I didn't always think of you.'

"'When it's a matter of love, that is true.'

"'I think of you for everything. My little Loquet, you must lend me the fifteen thousand francs.'

"'I should be delighted to oblige you, my sweet love; but there's a trifle that prevents me too: I have no money.'

"'Oh! nonsense!'

"'Five or six hundred francs, at your service, but no more. I am just beginning the practice of medicine, you understand; I have a large number of patients already: almost all the lorettes in the Bréda quarter have me to attend them, and they often have trifling indispositions; but not one of them ever pays me, that isn't their custom. As for my parents, who live in La Beauce, they have got tired of sending me money. They claim that I ought to have acquired talent enough to earn my living. Parbleu! talent isn't what I lack, but paying patients.'

"My brunette stamped impatiently, crying:

"'I mean to make my fortune, I tell you, and I can do it by selling seamless gloves. Look you, my little Loquet, you can give me your notes of hand; I can negotiate them; the owner of the process will take them in payment.'

"'But how am I to pay them?'

"'The profits will begin to come in before they fall due; I shall be selling my new gloves, and we shall have the means to pay them.'

"I hesitated; but my brunette was so sure of success; and then, I had dined well, and at such times I sign whatever anyone asks me to. I made five notes of hand, of three thousand francs each.—You can guess the result! The seamless gloves tore as soon as anyone attempted to put them on. My poor Satiné was forced to assign. We paid the first two notes, but I was obliged to sell almost everything I possessed. The third has come due, and they will soon be here to demand payment. I am besieged already by a crowd of other creditors; for, after all, a man must live, and clothe himself, and have a roof over his head. I am completely cleaned out! But I don't bear my mistress any grudge; she has gone to law with the villain who defrauded her with his secret, and hopes to make him disgorge the last two notes at least, and——"

A ring at the doorbell interrupted Balloquet, who sat up in bed and looked at me, saying in an undertone:

"Damnation! there's someone!"

"Shall I open the door?"

"No, no! wait a moment. I recognize a creditor by his way of ringing; perhaps it's the bearer of that note. No matter! I might as well have it over with. Wait!"

Balloquet jumped out of bed and opened a closet near the headboard, in which I saw a rather large iron chest set into the wall.

"I found this safe here when I took possession," whispered Balloquet, "and it serves my turn splendidly."

"I can't imagine what purpose a safe can serve, when you have no money."

"You will see, my dear fellow."

He opened the chest, threw in three large two-sou pieces, then said to me:

"Will you lend me two hundred-sou pieces for a few minutes? They will do much better."

"With pleasure, my dear fellow! do you want more?"

"No, two are enough, but I don't happen to have any at this moment."

He took out the two-sou pieces and replaced them by the five-franc pieces I had given him; then, untying his squirrel, he put him into the chest, and at once closed and locked the door, taking care to remove the key. Then he closed the closet. Having completed this operation, he returned to the bed, motioning to me to open the door.

An old man stood on the landing, well dressed, very short and stout, with a red face; he had all the externals of a retired restaurant keeper.

"Monsieur Balloquet, if you please?"

"This is the place, monsieur."

"I have come to collect a note for——"

"Be good enough to come in, monsieur."

He entered the inner room, where Balloquet, still in bed, nodded his head to him.

"I have come," the visitor repeated, "to collect a note of hand for three thousand francs, due to-morrow; but to-morrow being a holiday, it falls due the day before."

"Very well, monsieur. Please take a seat, and you shall be paid.—My dear Charles, will you be good enough to get the amount from my safe? It's in the closet at the head of my bed."

Balloquet said this with a self-possession which I could not but admire; I opened the closet, and we heard the jingling of money in the safe. I guessed that it was the squirrel playing with the coins with which he was confined, and I had to bite my lips to keep from laughing, while Balloquet exclaimed:

"I would like right well to know what my next-door neighbor is doing; something that shakes the house, apparently, as it makes the gold pieces dance in my safe; and it's like that almost all day. I shall end by complaining to the landlord.—Take three thousand francs and pay monsieur, will you, Charles?"

I put my head into the closet and replied:

"But the safe is locked and the key isn't in it."

"What do you say? the key isn't in the lock?"

"No."

"Look on the floor—and on top."

"I have looked on top and underneath, but I don't see any key."

"Ah! the rattle-headed rascal! I'll stake my head that that's what has happened. Sapristi! it puts me in a pretty fix, on my word!"

"What's the matter?"

"Imagine, Charles, that I had twelve thousand francs to pay this morning. It was all right, the funds were ready—I am never behindhand, you know—but, being ill, I had asked Bertinet, a friend of mine, who happened to drop in, to stay with me, so that I need not have to get up. He consented, after some urging; he had business

at Rouen and was in a hurry to be off. Luckily, my creditor came early to get the twelve thousand francs. Bertinet paid him, and soon after went away. Well, I see now that the careless fellow must have put the key of my safe in his pocket, by accident, and gone off with it! It's very amusing, as he isn't to return for a week!"

Balloquet's tale was accompanied by the rattle of the silver pieces, which the squirrel kept constantly in motion in the safe. It seemed to me a most ingenious trick, and I rejoined, indulgently:

"It's all the more disagreeable because these safes have secret locks and there's no way of opening them except by destroying them altogether; and that would be a pity, for they're quite expensive."

"I should say so! that safe cost me nine hundred francs. But it's a solid fellow! You might try to smash it, but you couldn't do it. It would require a charge of gunpowder to open it, and then—— You see what has happened, monsieur; I am exceedingly mortified that you have come here for nothing, but it is not my fault; my friend will return in a week, and then——"

The old gentleman, who had listened with an expression bordering on idiocy, rejoined in the same tone as when he first entered the room:

"I have come to collect a note for three thousand francs, due to-morrow; but as to-morrow is a——"

"All right, monsieur!" interposed Balloquet, impatiently; "I know perfectly well why you have come, and I was going to pay you. Parbleu! your money's there; it isn't the money that's lacking; indeed, you can hear my gold pieces dancing, thanks to my neighbor. But as I haven't the key of my safe, as it has been carried off by mistake,—for it wasn't done maliciously, I am sure,—I

can't pay you to-day. It is annoying, I can understand that; but, after all, it's only a delay of a few days."

The little old man blew his nose at great length, took a pinch of snuff, coughed, spat, wiped his nose, and began:

"I have come to collect a note——"

"Sapristi! this is too much!" cried Balloquet, throwing his head back on his pillow; then he crawled under his bedclothes, so that nothing was visible but the end of his nose, muttering: "Do what you please; I have had enough; I've nothing more to say."

The bearer of the note of hand gazed at me in blank amazement. I tried to make him understand the situation. I took him by the hand and led him to the safe, where the squirrel was still at play, and said:

"How do you expect my friend to pay you? He hasn't the key; it's at Rouen; and there's no way of forcing this lock."

"But then I, who came here to——"

"Come again in a few days; then my friend will have his key, and you will be paid. I have the honor to salute you, monsieur; if you should stay here three hours, the fact would remain the same, so you might as well go!"

And I pushed him gently toward the door; he made no resistance, so I escorted him to the landing and closed the door on him. I heard him mumbling as he went downstairs:

"I came to collect a note of hand for three thousand francs——"

"Bravo, my dear Rochebrune, and a thousand thanks!" said Balloquet. "We had hard work; he was as tenacious as the devil, that fellow, but I am rid of him."

"He'll come again in a few days."

"He won't find me, for I am going to move, to hide myself, wall myself up. Would you have me pay a second time for those seamless abortions? Satiné will find money somehow—that's her business."

The bell rang again.

"*Bigre!* do you suppose the old fossil has come back? He can't have gone to get a locksmith, can he?"

"It isn't probable; he hasn't had time. What are you going to do? Shall I open the door?"

"Faith! the squirrel is still in the safe, playing his little game. If it happens to be a creditor, the trick may work again. Be kind enough to open the door."

I complied with his request, and received a lady fully fifty years of age, who was dressed with much coquetry, although her costume was not absolutely fresh. She bowed to me, and, without waiting to be ushered in, walked quickly by me, saying:

"I beg pardon, monsieur, it's Monsieur Balloquet I want to see, and I know he's in; I took pains to inquire."

She was in the inner room before I had had time to answer her. Seeing my friend in bed, she started back; but she speedily recovered herself and went on.

"Ah! so you're in bed, are you?" she exclaimed. "But, after all, the doctors visit us when we're in bed; so why shouldn't we do the same by them?"

"Perfectly argued, Madame Philocome. Pray take the trouble to be seated."

Madame Philocome took a chair, after some show of reluctance.

"Are you sick?" she said, twisting her mouth out of shape.

"Mon Dieu! yes, dear Madame Philocome, I am sick. But may I know to what I am indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"Why, I happen to have in my hands a little *broche* of yours."

"A *broche?*"

"A little note, if you like that better; a hundred and fifty francs. It's a small matter. You made it to your tailor's order; he paid it to me, and I came to collect it. If, at the same time, you could give me what you owe me for perfumery and essences, you know——"

"Yes, I know that I owe you a trifle. Parbleu! if you have your bill here, we'll settle the whole thing together; I ask nothing better."

"It will be an accommodation to me, especially as you don't come to see us any more, doctor; you've taken your custom away from us; that's all wrong."

"Not at all; but when I moved into another quarter——"

"Here's my bill; it amounts to a hundred and thirty-two francs."

"Very good; a hundred and fifty and a hundred and thirty-two; that makes two hundred and eighty-two in all.—My dear Charles, do me the favor to take that amount from my safe."

Thereupon we performed for Madame Philocome's benefit the scene of the lost key, with an accompaniment of money jingling by the squirrel. But I was pained to see that the perfumer shook her head and smiled in a very equivocal fashion. Finally, when Balloquet essayed to express his regret at the loss of his key, the old coquette interrupted him, saying:

"It seems that you mislay your key very often, monsieur; for I have happened to see two of your creditors, and they have told me why you didn't pay them; it was exactly the same thing as to-day—the same scheme and the same details."

"That may be, madame; in fact, I did lose my key several days ago."

"Then, monsieur, why did you pretend at first that you were ready to pay me?"

Balloquet buried himself under the bedclothes, with a horrible grimace. I closed the closet door so that we could no longer hear the squirrel, whose efforts thenceforth were of no avail. Madame Philocome settled herself comfortably in her chair, saying:

"I'm very sorry, monsieur, but I want my money. You must have some, judging from that silvery tinkle in your safe. I refuse to be so good-natured as the others you have got rid of by this means. You must pay me; I won't go away until you do."

"Then you'll stay here a long while, madame."

"It's all the same to me, monsieur; I'm in no hurry."

Balloquet angrily rolled himself up in his bedclothes. I seated myself beside the hearth, curious to see how it would end. Madame Philocome stared for a while at the centre-piece on the ceiling, then took a book from the shelves. If she began to read, the situation might be prolonged indefinitely.

After some time, Balloquet broke the silence by groaning as if he were in pain; I rose and went to the bedside.

"My friend," he said, with a wink that I understood, "is my face red in spots?"

"Why, yes—you have some blotches."

"Are the whites of my eyes yellow?"

"Very yellow!"

"The devil! Be kind enough to look at my tongue and tell me if there are any little swellings on it?"

He put out his tongue, and I exclaimed after examining it:

"It's covered with them!"

"Damnation! Then it must be that; I can't fool myself any longer. I know now what my trouble is. However, I can take care of myself."

"Why, what is your trouble?"

"Pardieu! I am going to have the smallpox, that's all! However, I have been vaccinated!"

Balloquet had not finished speaking, when Madame Philocome threw down her book, sprang abruptly to her feet, and rushed from the room, crying:

"Adieu, doctor! you can pay me later; when you please!"

"But, Madame Philocome, if you would rather wait for my key, I'll send to Rouen."

It was unnecessary to say more; we heard the outer door open and close with a bang, and Madame Philocome scrambling down the stairs. Then Balloquet looked at me and roared with laughter, in which I joined. We were still laughing, I am sure, when the old coquette was a long way from the house.

XXVII

A CONSULTATION

"What do you think of my second method, Rochebrune?"

"Excellent; indeed, I think that it's better than the other, for it requires less preparation."

"That depends. We have creditors who will defy smallpox, yellow fever—aye, the plague itself. But I must get up and liberate my squirrel, and return your ten francs."

"I will take back the ten francs, which would be of no great use to you; but if you would like this five-hundred-franc note, which I put in my pocket with a view to settling with my tailor, why, don't hesitate to say so; I shall be glad to do you a service."

Balloquet forgot that he was in his shirt; he leaped on my neck, crying:

"Would I like it! I should say so! I wouldn't have asked for it, but you offer it! You're a friend indeed! Let me hear anyone say that there are no such things as friends nowadays! Dear old Rochebrune! And you don't know me very well, either."

"I know you well enough to be happy that I am able to oblige you."

"Oh! by the way, I ought to warn you of one thing: I can't say just when I shall be able to pay you."

"Don't let that disturb you! You may pay me when fortune smiles on you again, when you have a profitable practice."

"Oh! as for that, you will be the first person paid. So I'm in funds once more! *Vive la joie!*—No more potatoes! I've had enough of them; I've been stuffed with them for a long time. But I won't tell Satiné that my pockets are lined, for she has always some invention or other in her head, and it's too risky."

I was about to take leave of Balloquet, who was just pulling on his trousers, when we heard three little taps at his door. The young doctor listened and smiled.

"What sort of a farce are you going to play this time?" I asked him.

"Oh! this is no creditor, my dear fellow, I am sure. The creditor knocks noisily; but those soft little taps—I'll bet that it's someone to consult me."

He went into the outer room and called:

"Who's there?"

"Someone who wishes to consult monsieur le médécin," replied a soft, female voice.

"I will leave you," I said, taking my hat; but Balloquet detained me.

"Do stay," he said. "Thus far you have seen nothing but the unpleasant features of my position as a debtor; it is only fair that you should be a witness also of the advantages we owe to our profession. This is some girl to consult me. It is sometimes quite amusing to listen. They conceal nothing from their doctor; they tell him some things that they certainly wouldn't tell their lovers."

"But she won't dare to say anything before a witness, will she?"

"It will be enough to tell her that you're a confrère; then she'll look on you as another myself. If there were ten of us here, and I should say they were all doctors, she'd take them all for her confidants."

"In that case, I will stay and listen to the consultation."

I resumed my seat, while Balloquet donned his dressing gown, and opened the door himself.

The doctor was not mistaken; it was a young girl, with a costume halfway between that of a grisette and a nursery maid. Light hair, an attractive face, eyes cast down like an innocent schoolgirl, but with a certain twist in her gait which bore no trace of innocence.

She made a courtesy, then glanced at me, and halted.

"Monsieur is a confrère, another myself," said Balloquet; "so you may speak before him without fear; indeed, you may be the gainer by so doing, for two opinions are better than one. Be seated, mademoiselle, and tell me what brings you here."

The girl courtesied again, and tried to smile; but in the midst of the smile, her features contracted with pain; she pressed her lips together, clenched her hands, and leaned against the desk.

"Are you in pain?" asked Balloquet, pushing a chair toward her.

She seemed to breathe with difficulty, but she smiled again, saying:

"It's over now; I hope it won't amount to anything, but it makes me feel very bad at times."

"Tell me what it is."

"I am a lacemaker, monsieur; but there hasn't been much doing in that trade for some time, and one earns so little! And I admit that I'm a good deal of an idler; when I'm sent on an errand, I like to stop in front of the caricature shops and confectioners; and I like the theatre too, and balls. It's such good fun to dance at Mabille, at Valentino's, and at the Cité-d'Antin. In fact, I like a good time, I don't deny it."

"That's characteristic of your age, mademoiselle; indeed, we all like a good time. Everyone enjoys it according to his tastes. At twenty, it's love and clothes; at thirty, money; at forty, ambition and titles; later, cards and rest. But at every age, when we seek to gratify our desires, we are always after a good time. Go on."

"But, monsieur, when you want to enjoy yourself, and haven't any money, it's very hard!"

"Sometimes; it depends on the sort of enjoyment you want."

"One night, I was walking on the Champs-Élysées with a friend of mine, who's a good deal of an idler, like myself, and likes good things to eat, too. As we passed a café, we looked at the people eating ices at the tables outside, and my friend said: 'I've never eaten any of that! None of the lovers I've ever had have been good for more than a bottle of cider or beer. Oh, yes! there was one who ordered punch; but he drank it all and didn't leave me half a glass!'—'I don't know what ices taste like, either,' said I; 'but I'd like right well to try one.'—At that, a fat man behind us, who was listening to us, I suppose, said: 'Allow me to satisfy your longing, mesdemoiselles, and to offer you an ice. See, here's an unoccupied table; let's sit down here.'

"I was rather taken by surprise and didn't know what to reply, but my friend nudged me and whispered: 'Let's accept and take the ices; what harm will it do? it don't bind us to anything. Besides, he's a well-dressed man, he's *comme il faut.* I'm going to accept, anyway!'—And she drew me toward the table. You can understand that I couldn't very well refuse.—Well, he treated us; my friend had three ices, but I only took two; they made

my teeth ache a little. He stuffed us with cakes and macaroons, too; so my friend thought he was charming; but he wasn't at all to my taste. His face was red and all covered with pimples. However, he had pleasant manners, and, although my friend made eyes at him, he paid all his attention to me. That made my friend mad. At last, messieurs—monsieur le docteur—you understand?"

"Yes, perfectly; you made the acquaintance of the stout man who paid for the ices; but that doesn't tell us why you are suffering now."

"Ah! that's the sequel. I had known that gentleman about six months. I hadn't got used to him at all; but I had got used to his presents. It isn't that he was very generous—— However, when you don't love a man, you ask nothing better than to deceive him."

"That is perfectly natural, mademoiselle; sometimes, indeed, you deceive him when you do love him."

"Oh! that's true, too; I believe such things have been known. Well, about six weeks ago I made the acquaintance of a young man I liked very much."

"And you left the stout party?"

"Mon Dieu! I intended to, certainly—that was my purpose—but——"

"You didn't have a chance, eh?"

"That's it, monsieur. I was looking for an opportunity; I didn't know just what to do, for I had discovered that Monsieur Bouqueton was very brutal, with all his *comme il faut* air."

"Bouqueton!" I exclaimed, struck by that name, as I recalled Madame Dauberny's confidences on the subject of her husband. "So your stout man's name is Bouqueton, is it?"

"Yes, monsieur. Do you know him?"

"No, not I. But I have heard of him from a friend of mine, who didn't speak very highly of him. Go on, mademoiselle."

"I was looking for a chance to break with Monsieur Bouqueton; but, meanwhile, I continued to receive his presents—so as not to make him suspicious. Well, three days ago, my lover—my real lover—came and asked me to dine with him at a little restaurant on Rue du Ponceau, where they have private rooms. Naturally, I said *yes*. When I went out, I met my friend, the one who had the ices with me on the Champs-Élysées. She asked me where I was going, and I was fool enough to tell her. Oh! women are such traitors! It's never safe to trust one's friends! I am sure that it was she who told Monsieur Bouqueton that I had another lover. By making trouble between him and me, she hoped he'd take her, I suppose—the vile slut! Well, messieurs, when I came out of the restaurant with my lover, I saw Monsieur Bouqueton standing guard at the door. I trembled all over. I didn't want to go home, but my young man couldn't take me with him, for he hadn't any rooms of his own: he lives with his employer, four clerks in one room. I couldn't go and play puss-in-the-corner with all four; so I says to myself: 'Never mind! here's the opportunity I've been looking for to break with Monsieur Bouqueton.'

"Sure enough, I hadn't been at home half an hour, when someone knocked at my door. It was Monsieur Bouqueton. I was all of a tremble when I opened the door; but I was surprised to hear him speak to me very gently, and say: 'So you don't love me any more, Annette?'—My name's Annette.—'I can't blame you; for I know that liaisons like ours can't last forever. I have come to say good-bye to you; but I don't propose to part on bad terms; on

the contrary, to prove that I don't bear you any grudge, I'll treat you to *bischoff*. I know a place where they make it delicious. We'll take a cab and go there; then I'll bring you home, and we'll part the best of friends.'

"I was so delighted that Monsieur Bouqueton didn't make a scene, that I accepted his invitation. I certainly ought to have been suspicious of his honey-sweet air, but I'm very fond of *bischoff*. Oh! what a miserable thing it is to be a glutton! That fault has always made me make a fool of myself.

"I put my cap on again, and we went out. Monsieur Bouqueton put me into a cab, but I didn't hear what he said to the driver. We started off. It was about ten o'clock at night. The cab went on and on.

"'Is this café of yours very far?' I asked.

"'Rather far; but we shall soon be there now.'

"The cab stopped at last. Monsieur Bouqueton helped me out and paid the cabman, who drove away. I looked about; it was as dark as a pocket, and we had no lantern. All I could see was big trees.

"'Where are we?' I asked, beginning to be frightened; for I began to suspect treachery. I couldn't see any light; but the trees made me think that we might be on the outer boulevards. But why should he have taken me there? At that time of night, in winter, all the restaurants must be closed.

"Without answering my question, Monsieur Bouqueton took my arm and led me away; we walked for some minutes, but didn't meet a soul.

"'I won't go any farther,' I said suddenly, and stopped. 'You have deceived me, and I want to go back to Paris.'

"'Well! all right! we won't go any farther,' said my conductor, in a voice whose savage accent froze the blood

in my veins. 'We are well enough here for what I have to say to you, and for the lesson I propose to give you.'

"He had no sooner said this than he knocked me down with a blow of his fist. I shrieked as I fell; but the miserable villain knew well enough that no one would come to my rescue. He called me the most horrible names—beggar—oh! I can't tell you all the vile names he called me! Certainly, I deserved some of them! But he wasn't content with treating me like the lowest of the low; he kicked me in the head and breast and everywhere."

"What a ghastly thing!" cried Balloquet, while I, restraining my feelings with the utmost difficulty, felt great drops of perspiration on my brow. The story of that loathsome conduct made my cheeks tingle.

"I begged Monsieur Bouqueton to spare me," continued Annette. "I confessed my guilt and begged for mercy; but he would not listen; he kept on kicking me and calling me vile names. At last, he hurt me so that I could not speak. I don't know whether the monster thought he had killed me,—that was his purpose, I don't doubt,—but, when he saw that I didn't move, he may have been frightened, for he suddenly ran off, and I heard his steps die away in the distance. I lay there on the ground a long while, in horrible pain. At last a heavy wagon came along, and the driver heard me groaning. He came to me, put me in his wagon, and took me as far as the barrier, where he left me. There they gave me what assistance I needed. I came to myself, but when they asked me what had happened, I couldn't tell them the truth, so I made up a story about robbers. When I felt able to go home, they called a cab and sent me home. All men aren't as wicked as Monsieur Bouqueton, thank God! if they were, we should have to long for another

Flood. The next day, I took some medicine. The blows on my hips and legs are all black and blue, but they won't amount to anything. I hoped it would be the same with the one I got here, on the breast, but it hurts me awfully, it cuts like a knife; and that's why I came to see you, monsieur."

"Let me see the bruise, my child; you must show us your breast—doctors, you know——"

"Oh! I'll show you whatever you say, monsieur."

And, without any false modesty, Mademoiselle Annette unbuttoned her dress and bared her breast. At that moment we could examine it without any risk to her, for the thought that the poor girl was in pain put all other thoughts to flight. Under the left breast there was a purple spot, with a yellowish circle all about it. Balloquet frowned and his face became grave and sad; I believed that I could divine his thought and I turned my head away; the sight was too distressing. The girl meanwhile smiled a wan sort of smile, and said:

"That was a famous blow I got, wasn't it, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, yes."

The doctor put his finger on the purple spot.

"Does that hurt?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"And that?"

"Yes!"

"And that?"

"Oh! yes, it does!"

"We must look after this; you must do just what I say, and take the draught I prescribe."

"But it isn't dangerous, is it, monsieur?"

Balloquet made an effort to resume his customary cheerful expression as he replied:

"No, mademoiselle, no; you will come out all right. But you must follow my directions carefully; you must keep a bandage on your breast all the time, wet with a liquid I will give you."

"You don't need to feel it any more, monsieur?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"When must I come again?"

Balloquet reflected a moment, and said:

"Don't come here again; I am going to move, and I don't know yet where I shall go; but leave me your address; I will call to see you."

"Oh! you are very kind, monsieur; but—when a doctor puts himself out to call, it costs more than when one goes to see him."

"Never fear; it won't cost you any more, for it won't cost anything."

"Oh! you are very good! And you won't forget to come?"

"If your bruise was a mere trifle, I might forget you; but it's serious enough to prevent my neglecting it. I will come to see you."

"This is my address, monsieur: Annette—Rue Rochechouart, corner of Rue Bellefond."

"Just Annette?"

"That's all, monsieur; when a girl has been foolish, she ought not to bear her parents' name."

"Here, my child, here are your prescriptions. Be careful to follow my directions. Don't tire yourself, and be good. It's a bore, I know, but it is necessary for your safety. I will see you in a few days."

The girl had rebuttoned her dress and was about to leave the room.

"Have you seen Monsieur Bouqueton since?" I asked.

"Oh, no, monsieur! the monster! If I should see him, I believe I should faint with fright."

"But what about your young lover? Didn't he promise to avenge you, when he found out what had happened?"

"Oh, yes! he is going to square accounts with him, if he ever meets him. But he's a thoughtless fellow, my lover is! He says that one day, but forgets all about it the next."

"Well, mademoiselle, I promise you that you shall be avenged; I promise you that Monsieur—Bouqueton shall receive sooner or later the punishment that his treatment of you deserves. If your lover doesn't administer it, I myself will undertake to do it."

"You, monsieur? Why, do you know Monsieur Bouqueton?"

"I never saw the man, but I know who he is. I tell you again—you shall be avenged."

"Oh! mon Dieu! monsieur, I am not very vindictive; just let me get well, and I won't think any more about that old villain.—I have the honor to salute you, monsieur le médécin!"

"I expected that you were to witness an amusing consultation," said Balloquet, after Annette had gone; "for these girls come to see us so often for mere trifles. But, unluckily, I was mistaken. That poor creature made my heart ache, her injury is so serious; I anticipate the worst—terrible suffering, and death."

"Poor girl! What a punishment for her sins! What a ghastly result of idleness, of indolence! I will not say, of coquetry, for there was nothing in her dress to indicate that she has ever been kept."

"Is it true that you know this infamous blackguard who kicked her in the breast?"

"Yes; his name is not Bouqueton; that is a name he assumes to cover up his escapades."

"Look you, my dear fellow, if ever you need my help in thrashing that scoundrel, you will afford me a very great pleasure, and I beg you not to forget me. I am a good-for-naught, I admit; I love all the women whose physique makes them worth the trouble of loving; I deceive them without scruple, because they pay me back in my own coin. In that respect, I fancy you are not unlike me. But to strike a woman, to inflict bodily suffering on a weak creature to whom we have owed the most delicious of joys!—oh! that is infamous, execrable! No infidelity can excuse such barbarous conduct!"

"You are quite right, Balloquet. Remember the two lines that have never grown old, despite their antiquity:

> "'Let shallow fops cry out, and fools lament;
> The honest man, deceived, departs and says no word.'

Au revoir, Balloquet! you will let me know about the poor girl, won't you?"

"To be sure! I will call on you and give you my address, when I have one."

XXVIII

A WORD OF ADVICE.—AN ASSIGNATION

It was cold, but the weather was superb. On leaving Balloquet, the whim seized me to take a turn about the garden of the Tuileries. I found many people in the garden. Fashionably attired ladies, well supplied with furs and warm cloaks, were seated along the main avenue, near the Terrasse des Feuillants. I glanced at them without stopping, but with the pleasure that one has in looking at flowers when one walks through a flower garden.

Suddenly I felt an involuntary thrill; I had recognized Madame Sordeville, but not until I was almost face to face with her. I was about to look the other way, when I saw another familiar face beside Armantine's: Madame Dauberny was sitting with her friend. They had seen me, and both had their eyes fixed on me. To pretend not to see them was impossible, and I raised my hat.

Frédérique barely moved her head, still looking at me, but maintaining the grave and almost frigid expression which she had adopted with me. It was not so with Madame Sordeville; she smiled upon me most affably, and said in her sweetest voice, as she pointed to a vacant chair by her side:

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Rochebrune? I supposed that you had gone abroad, it is so long since we saw you. Pray sit down a moment with us. As we must depend upon chance for meeting you, you will surely give us a few moments."

"If monsieur is in a hurry, why do you insist upon detaining him?" said Frédérique, sharply. "For my part, I have never understood how anyone could compel a person to break an appointment wholly as a matter of courtesy."

But I had already seated myself beside Madame Sordeville, for I could not resist the charm of her smile. All my resolutions vanished before that smile, and I replied:

"I have time to stop; and even if I had any business on hand, I should be too happy to postpone it for such a pleasure."

Frédérique said nothing; she sat erect in her chair, with her head thrown back a little, so that I could not see her face; but, as a compensation, I was able to look at Armantine to my heart's content, for she turned to me and said, with the same charmingly amiable expression:

"Why have you abandoned us so entirely, monsieur? Our house must have offered you very little attraction. Indeed, I can easily believe that our small parties are not very amusing; and yet, I had imagined that you would enjoy yourself there. I was very foolish, was I not?"

"No, madame; you were quite right. But urgent business——"

"Oh! don't talk like that, monsieur; you know perfectly well that we don't believe anything of the sort. You have found more entertainment with others, and you have been very sensible to give them the preference."

"You know that that is not true, madame."

"Know it, monsieur? How do you expect me to know anything, except that you suddenly ceased to come to us? It seems to me that I could not very well ask you the reason. I was talking with Frédérique about you a moment ago."

"What! you thought of me, madame?"

"Yes," murmured Frédérique, swaying back and forth on her chair; "Armantine was saying that you sang ballads beautifully."

Madame Sordeville nudged her friend; I believe, indeed, that she pinched her. As for myself, being not at all wounded by that malicious remark, I hastened to reply:

"If I had any pretension to be considered a singer, madame, what you have just said might mortify me; but as it has never occurred to me to hold myself out as anything of the sort, I will be the first to laugh with you over my performance at Madame Sordeville's."

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Rochebrune, I have no idea why Frédérique said that; I don't think that she did it to laugh at you, for, after all, it may happen to anyone not to be in condition for singing—to have trouble with his throat;—and he may sing perfectly well another time."

"He takes his revenge," said Frédérique, in an undertone. "'This play is by a clever man who will take his revenge sooner or later.'—That's the consecrated phrase of newspaper critics after a play has failed."

"You seem to be very ill-disposed toward me, madame," I said, trying to catch a glimpse of Madame Dauberny's face; but I could not succeed.

"I, monsieur? Not in the least; I am joking, that's all. I am not one of those people whose feelings are changed by a false note."

Armantine seemed ill at ease, and hastened to change the subject. We talked about indifferent matters, but our eyes were not indifferent. Madame Dauberny did not utter a word. Was she angry with me? did she still bear me a grudge? Surely it was a long while for

a kiss to rankle! I was almost grieved by Frédérique's treatment of me, but Armantine made me forget it by the amiable way in which she talked with me. I had never seen her show so much pleasure in being with me. However, I realized that I must not wear my welcome out, so I took leave of them.

"Shall I still have to depend on chance meetings for a glimpse of you?" asked Madame Sordeville, as she answered my salutation.

"No, madame; I shall not again wait for chance to serve me, as it might not always be so favorable."

Frédérique nodded slightly in acknowledgment of my bow, but not a word, not a smile.

"Upon my word," thought I, "she's very sensitive for a *gaillarde!*"

Armantine, I had been told, was a flirt; and, indeed, I had been several times in a position to judge that it was not safe to rely on the hopes she aroused. But, without flattering myself that I could cure her of that failing, it was possible that she might love me. After all, I had never yet met a perfect woman; in truth, I had never sought one. In short, that lady had turned my head again by her glances and her smiles, and I had already forgotten the way she treated me at her two receptions; the resolution I had formed not to expose myself again to the risk of being made the plaything of a coquette did not hold out against the allurements she had practised on me. Mon Dieu! why should we keep our resolutions in love, when we have no resolution at all in respect to the most serious matters?

On the day following this meeting, I could contain myself no longer, and I made a careful toilet with the purpose of calling on Madame Sordeville; for I had

noticed that she attached some importance to the costumes of her guests. That was another pardonable foible in a woman who thought constantly of dress, and who believed, in all probability, that everybody agreed with her as to the momentous nature of the subject.

I was preparing to go out, when Pomponne brought me a letter which had just been handed to the concierge with the request that it be delivered to me at once.

I did not know the writing; in such cases, the first thing one does after breaking the seal is to look at the signature. I saw at the foot of the page: *Frédérique.*

What! Madame Dauberny writing to me! I lost no further time in reading the letter.

"You are probably intending to go to Madame Sordeville's. Do not go there, do not go to that house again; this is the best advice I can give you. If you are really desirous to see Armantine, if your love for her has revived, thanks to the coquetries she lavished upon you yesterday, see her elsewhere than at her own house. I write you these lines because I remember our pleasant intimacy, which was of short duration, but which has left in my heart marks of its passage. So, trust me and take my advice. I should consider that I insulted you if I should ask you not to mention this warning.

"FRÉDÉRIQUE."

The contents of that letter seemed to me most extraordinary. I read it over several times, but could not understand it. Frédérique urged me not to go to Madame Sordeville's, but she gave me no reason, no hint, as to the purpose of that warning. It could be nothing more than

a freak, the result of momentary ill humor with her friend. I was much perplexed by the letter, but I had no idea of following the advice contained therein. Indeed, for some time past, Madame Dauberny had treated me so strangely, she had been so cold to me, that I found it hard to believe in that recrudescence of friendship of which she spoke in her letter. If she meant the warning seriously, why did she not come and speak to me herself? She had told me several times that she had no more hesitation in calling on a young man than on a friend of her own sex.

And so, without giving another thought to Frédérique's advice, I went at once to Madame Sordeville's.

I found Armantine in her dainty boudoir, surrounded by flowers and embroidery.

I do not know whether she expected me, but it seemed to me that her dress and her coiffure were even more coquettish than usual. Probably I was mistaken, and it was because I was not accustomed to gaze upon her charms that they produced that effect on me.

I was welcomed with extreme cordiality. Armantine had her merry, sarcastic, and melancholy moods. On the day in question, she seemed almost sentimental; she laughed less frequently than usual, but I considered her the more fascinating so.

She gave me her hand and bade me sit beside her, saying:

"This is delightful! It hasn't taken you long to keep your promise this time."

"It is my greatest happiness to be with you, madame; and my reason for depriving myself of that happiness so long is that——"

"Well, monsieur? it is that——?"

"That—— Look you, madame, I propose to be quite frank; have I your permission?"

"Why, of course."

"I propose to tell you of all the torments I have suffered. In the first place, I love you—but you are well aware of that; I have told you so before."

"Yes, you have told me so; but that is no reason why it should be true. All men say as much to a woman who is at all attractive, and of whom they flatter themselves that they can make the conquest."

"But, in that case, madame, what must a man do to prove that he really loves?"

"In the first place, it seems to me that he should not let centuries pass without calling; you must agree, monsieur, that that is a curious way of proving one's love."

"But, madame, when he is received coldly, when the person in question does not deign to address a word to him, after having given him some reason to hope; and when she laughs and talks incessantly with other men before his eyes, without any pity for the anguish he suffers——"

Armantine laughed aloud, disconcerting me so that I dared not go on.

"Ah!" she cried, when her paroxysm of merriment had subsided; "that is to say, monsieur, that if a woman was weak enough to listen to you and believe you, she must never listen to any other man's gallant speeches? When a gentleman accosted her, she should run away at once, lest he be tempted to offer her his homage? Perhaps, too, she ought to make wry faces, squint when anyone looks at her, for fear she might be thought pretty?"

"Oh! madame!"

"If that's your way of thinking, monsieur, I must warn you that you would very often have occasion to lose your temper with me. I like to have men pay court to me; I like to have them think me pretty—yes, and tell me so. I don't know whether that is coquetry, but, in my opinion, there is no greater pleasure for a woman."

"No greater pleasure? Not even love? Not even to be loved sincerely?"

"One does not prevent the other."

"Well! tell me that you love me; let me prove to you that I adore you, and I promise not to be jealous of all the men I see fluttering about you. When a man has the certainty of being preferred to all others, then suspicion is an insult. But is he not justified in trembling, when he has received no favor?"

Armantine did not reply, but she was deeply moved. I tried to take advantage of her agitation to embrace her; but she pushed me away and eluded me, saying:

"What are you doing? Someone may come at any minute. I cannot deny myself to callers; the servants know that you are here."

"Very well! meet me somewhere. Do you not go out whenever you choose?"

"Yes, but—— One thing I will not do, and that is, go to your rooms. Someone might see me go in, and I should be ruined! I am not a *gaillarde*, like Frédérique, you know."

"Let us meet somewhere."

"I should never dare to go alone to any out-of-the-way place."

"You can take a cab."

"I should be afraid, all alone, in a cab. No, monsieur, I am no dare-devil; I am very cowardly."

"Say rather, madame, that you do not choose to grant me an assignation."

"Ah! monsieur is losing his temper already. Well, let me see; to-morrow I am to go to the Champs-Élysées with Madame Gerbancourt and her sister—two *petites-maîtresses* whom you must have seen here. They are not beautiful, but they are always beautifully dressed. Madame Gerbancourt has rather a good figure; her sister is too thin."

"I haven't the faintest recollection of the ladies."

"No matter! You will find us sitting opposite the Cirque."

"Very good!"

"It will be about two o'clock. You may come and speak to me. They live near by, on Rue de Ponthieu. When they start to go home, I will say that I am waiting for Frédérique. They will leave me, I will stay with you, and then——"

"Oh! you are adorable! I swear to love you all my life!"

"Really? I thought that you were in love with Madame Dauberny too?"

"With your friend? No, indeed; I have never dreamed of such a thing! I would have been glad to obtain her friendship; her original character pleased me mightily; but I have failed to do it. You must have noticed how coldly she treated me yesterday."

"Yes, I did. But I don't know what has been the matter with her lately; she is so capricious; I see much less of her than I used."

The doorbell rang, announcing visitors. I took leave of Madame Sordeville at once, fearing that something might happen to make her change her mind; for she was

very capricious, too, and it was not safe to give her time to retract.

"Until to-morrow!" I said, very tenderly, as I left the room.

I was so happy, that I trod on air. I was sure of my triumph now. When a woman gives us an assignation, is it not equivalent to a surrender? And, under such circumstances, the man who does not grasp the opportunity is an idiot—or something worse!

XXIX

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES

The day of my assignation was magnificently clear. I gave thanks to the weather; for if it had been stormy, she would not have been likely to walk on the Champs-Élysées; and the day before, in my delight, I had not thought of that. But everything seemed propitious, and I fairly swam in bliss. Pomponne curled his lip slightly, as he looked at me with an idiotic expression; the fellow evidently considered himself very penetrating. I thought of nothing but Armantine; I was really in love with her, and it seemed to me that I had never loved other women so dearly.

While dressing, I found Madame Dauberny's note in my pocket. I was overjoyed that I had not heeded her advice; but still I reread the note once more. I determined that, when I met the writer, she would have to explain what she meant by that warning.—"Our brief intimacy," she wrote, "has left in my heart marks of its

passage."—Really, I should not have suspected it, in view of her present treatment of me.

I was on the Champs-Élysées a little before two. It was cold; but the sun was so bright that there were many people driving and walking. The Champs-Élysées is the general rendezvous of the world of fashion. Magnificent equipages passed back and forth, or vanished in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne, escorted by innumerable equestrians, who always glanced inside the carriages as they passed; and when they saw a young and beautiful woman, they instantly assumed a more dashing air, and made their steeds prance and curvet, so that horse and rider might be admired at the same time.

The pedestrians, too, were very numerous; for winter costumes have a charm of their own, and the cloaks and furs in which a pretty woman wraps herself sometimes form an admirable foil for delicate features or dainty graces: the flowers we find under the snow seem fairer than others. You need not cry out—there are flowers under the snow.

My own attire was irreproachable, and I flattered myself that it was in excellent taste. I strolled along, beaming with anticipation, toward the appointed place. There were many people seated, but I soon spied her I sought. Armantine was there, with two ladies whom I recognized as having seen among her guests. The three vied with one another in elegance. I approached them and bowed, as if the meeting were accidental.

Madame Sordeville welcomed me with the sweetest glance, pointing to a chair by her side. We exchanged the customary greetings, and I seated myself beside Armantine.

"So you are not afraid of the cold?" she said laughingly.

"When ladies defy it, what would you think of me if I were afraid of it?"

"And then," said one of her companions, "if we had to pass the whole winter indoors, for fear of the cold, I fancy we should not be very fresh in the spring."

The ladies criticised the costumes and equipages of those who passed, and I put in a word or two now and then. But I was rather distraught, for I was dreaming of the happiness which I hoped for and expected, and I was counting the minutes. My plan was already formed. There are some excellent restaurants on the Champs-Élysées, with charming private rooms into which one can slip without being seen. If she refused to go to a restaurant, there were plenty of cabs; I had only to hire one with blinds and tell the driver to take us outside the walls.

I glanced at Armantine from time to time and motioned toward her two companions, murmuring under my breath words which she understood; for she whispered:

"Be patient a while."

At last, about three o'clock, Madame Gerbancourt said to her sister:

"We must be thinking about going home, for we are to have company to-day, you know.—Are you going soon, my dear?"

This question was addressed to Armantine, who replied:

"Madame Dauberny promised to join me here, and I shall wait for her. If Monsieur Rochebrune will honor me with his company till she comes, it will be very kind of him. It is putting his good nature to a severe test, but we have only one cavalier, and I must make the most of him."

I hastened to reply that I was entirely at her service; my heart beat fast with joy, for I thought that the two sisters were going away at last. But the younger said, as she drew her cloak about her:

"Oh! we have time enough; it isn't three o'clock. Your people won't come so early; we don't dine at three!"

"But they are provincials, my dear, and they think it's more polite to come and bore us two hours ahead of time."

"So much the worse for them! I am going to stay here until my watch says three o'clock."

"Obstinate!—You see, monsieur, she is younger than I am, and I always have to give way to her."

I was strongly tempted to reply that she did very wrong to give way. But I contented myself with tearing savagely at whatever I found in my pocket. There are times when one vents one's spleen on whatever happens to be at hand.

Suddenly we heard sounds of a dispute; the sounds drew nearer and came to a standstill about ten yards behind us, and a man's voice, which, although a little hoarse, rang out like a clarinet, cried:

"I tell you, you shan't go off like that! I've been looking for you long enough. It ain't an easy job to run you to earth; but I've got you now, and I'll hang on to you!"

"Come, come, no nonsense, Père Piaulard!" replied another voice; "you shouldn't insult a friend. I'm a friend, and you're a friend; you're an old friend, an old fellow I respect. Don't shake me like that! *Cré coquin!* I don't like to be shook!"

The tones of this second voice struck me as familiar; I could not say at once of whom they reminded me, yet

I was conscious of a vague feeling of alarm, of apprehension; I listened anxiously for what was to come.

The clarinet-like voice continued, more forcibly than before:

"Friends has nothing to do with it! Customers is all I know. You owe me money, and you've got to pay me; the last time you came to my place to drink with your girl, you didn't so much as ask my leave not to pay, but skulked off with your good-for-nothing slut through the back door, while the waiter was busy somewheres else."

"As I hadn't any money, what would have been the sense of my asking leave not to pay? Would that have put any *stuff* in my pockets?"

"When you haven't got anything to pay with, you shouldn't go and drink at a place where you owe twenty-two francs already."

"Well, that's a good one! I owe you money, and you want me to take away my custom, eh? Why, your wits are wool gathering just now, old Piaulard."

"A fine thing your custom is! Monsieur Ballangier's custom! My word! You're the kind of customer that ruins a place!"

I could doubt no longer: the name of Ballangier rang in my ears; indeed, I had already recognized the man; my face was flushed with shame, and my heart stood still. I dared not stir, or turn my head. I longed to be a hundred miles away. If I could have made my escape unseen by that man, I would have fled without a word. But he would probably see me. What was I to do? How could I hide from him?

All these thoughts passed through my mind at the same instant. The ladies spoke to me, but I did not reply; I had no idea what I was saying. Doubtless my

perturbation was reflected on my face, for Armantine cried:

"What on earth is the matter with you, Monsieur Rochebrune? You seem to be in pain; aren't you well?"

I stammered something, but I was listening—listening intently. It seemed to me that the voices came still nearer.

"Come now, Père Piaulard, let alone of my coat! it's old, and you'll tear it."

"I won't let you go. Pay me what you owe me; with the old account, it's twenty-nine francs. I need the money; pay me, or come before the magistrate; he'll have you arrested as a good-for-nothing, a tramp, a vagabond, as you are—and something worse, perhaps."

"I say! no rough words, or I'll lose my temper, too!"

"Mon Dieu!" said Madame Gerbancourt; "are those horrid men coming any nearer?"

"One of them is very drunk!" said Armantine. "How disgusting! Why, the men ought to be arrested! If we hadn't Monsieur Rochebrune with us, I should have run away long ago."

"Oh! mon Dieu! I believe they're going to fight; and they're coming this way!"

"Oh! look, monsieur!"

I did not turn my head; I pretended not to hear, pulled my hat over my eyes, and sat perfectly still.

Suddenly all three of the ladies jumped to their feet with a cry of alarm. Armantine seized my arm, so that I was compelled to rise. Ballangier, trying to escape from his persecutor, had almost fallen over our chairs, to one of which he clung to keep from falling. The wretch was drunk, but not enough so to prevent his

recognizing familiar faces; and the fatality which had brought him to that exact spot decreed that he should be at my side when I rose to follow the ladies.

The miserable sot uttered a cry of joy on recognizing me, and, seizing my overcoat with both hands just as his creditor descended upon him, he cried:

"Stop, Piaulard! you may go to the devil now! Here's a friend who'll answer for me—pay for me if necessary. Ah! he has the *stuff*, he has; and I forbid you to call me a thief before him; if you do, I'll have a crack at you in my turn—ugly mug!"

I stood as if petrified. I had not the strength to move a muscle. The great colossus, who was on the point of striking Ballangier, paused in amazement, and stared at me with the expression of one who cannot believe his ears. As for the ladies, they continued to pull me by the arm.

"For heaven's sake, push that man away!"

"Do come, Monsieur Rochebrune!"

"That drunkard takes you for a friend of his; drive him away, do! Come! let's not stay here. Oh! it's horrible to come in contact with such people!"

But I was incapable alike of speech and action. Moreover, Ballangier did not relax his grasp on my coat.

"Drive me away!" he cried; "me—his friend—the most intimate friend he's got in the world! I think I see him driving me away, good old Charles! Charlot—Rochebrune, if you like that better. Ah! you think I'm mistaken, do you? you think I don't know him? Just ask him if he don't know me; ask him, and see what he says. Piaulard, you're an old ass! I'm not a vagabond and a tramp, for I've got friends to answer for me.—You'll answer for me, won't you, Charles? you won't let this old rascal arrest me?"

BALLANGIER THWARTS ROCHEBRUNE'S PLANS

Ballangier, trying to escape from his persecutor, had almost fallen over our chairs, to one of which he clung to keep from falling. The wretch was drunk, but not enough so to prevent his recognizing familiar faces.

Since Ballangier had mentioned my name, and I, by my silence, had admitted that he was not lying when he said that he knew me, Madame Gerbancourt, her sister, and even Armantine herself, had dropped my arm; and, as a crowd soon collected about us, the first two speedily disappeared, and were lost in the multitude. Armantine also walked away, but I could see that she was still listening.

"If it's true that monsieur knows you, and if he chooses to pay your bill," said tall Piaulard, walking toward me, "that makes a difference, and things can be settled without a row."

I realized at that moment all the falseness and absurdity of my position; I realized also how foolish it is to be afraid of prejudice and the opinion of gossips. Passing abruptly from shame to anger, I extricated myself roughly from Ballangier's grasp, and, seizing him by the collar, shook him violently.

"Yes, I am unfortunate enough to know you!" I cried; "twenty times I have helped you, rescued you from want; but that gives you no right to make demands on me in a public place, when you are drunk. I will do nothing more for you, you wretch! And I forbid you ever to speak to me again!"

Excited by anger and disgust, I pushed Ballangier so violently that he fell with a crash among the chairs, at some distance. The crowd, always easily swayed in favor of the man who makes the most noise, began to laugh when the drunken man fell. I heard Monsieur Piaulard's voice threatening his debtor anew, but I was no longer disturbed by that; I had recovered my courage. I pushed my way through the crowd and looked about for Armantine; but the first person I saw was Madame Dauberny,

standing in a group of people a few steps away. She seemed to be inquiring what had happened. I paid no attention to Frédérique; it was Madame Sordeville whom I was looking for. I walked on, and ere long I was at a distance from the crowd and from the spot where that sickening scene had taken place. I spied a woman, alone, and walking very fast. It was Armantine. I ran after her, overtook her, and detained her.

"Ah! I have found you out at last!" I cried.

She turned and looked at me. Her expression was cold, and her manner almost impertinent; she stared at me a moment as if she did not know me, but concluded at last to answer:

"Ah! is it you, monsieur? How is it that you didn't stay with your—intimate friend?"

"Oh! I trust, madame, that you do not suppose that I associate with that wretch! There are some things, circumstances, which appear very odd, very strange at first sight, but which can easily be explained!"

"But I beg you to believe, monsieur, that I do not desire any explanation; you are entirely at liberty to select your friends in whatever social rank you choose."

"How strangely you speak to me, madame! What a manner! What icy coldness! What a change in your demeanor!"

"Oh! you are mistaken, monsieur; I assure you that my manners are the same as always. To be sure, they may, perhaps, differ a little from those of the people you associate with. But, excuse me, monsieur, I cannot stand here any longer, and I am not going in the same direction that you are."

"What! you are going to leave me!"

"Adieu, monsieur!—By the way, I must tell you that I do not receive any more. We have ceased to have our evenings at home."

She gave me a disdainful nod, and, without listening to my efforts to detain her, walked away so rapidly that I soon lost sight of her.

I was stupefied; that woman's conduct seemed to me so outrageous, so insulting, that it was some time before I could believe in its reality. It seemed to me that I must have been dreaming. For a moment, I was tempted to run after her; but I had enough control over myself to understand that it would be weak and cowardly to make any further attempt to speak to a woman who had treated me with such contempt. And I had believed that she loved me! Ah! how I had fooled myself! Because a drunken man in cap and blouse had called me his friend, because I had admitted that I knew him, I became a compromising personage, and she could no longer afford to see me or speak to me! she had even given me to understand that she did not propose to receive me at her own house! and all that, without listening to what I might have to say, without finding out whether I could or could not explain that unpleasant adventure. Ah, madame! I thought that you had a heart; I found that I was mistaken, that you had a mind only; and that is a very barren mind in which no trace of sentiment can ever be detected.

I stood a long while on the same spot, absorbed in my thoughts. But the throng had largely disappeared, and the Champs-Élysées was becoming deserted; snowflakes falling on my face explained the sudden change. The weather was no longer the same; the radiant sun was obscured by clouds, which, with the snow, gave a totally different aspect to the scene.

"Well!" I said to myself, as I walked slowly away, "nothing is constant, in the heavens or on earth! We must submit to the storms of the heart, as to those of nature."

As I retraced my steps toward the scene of that unfortunate meeting, I remembered the paroxysm of anger to which I had given way; and now that I was once more able to reflect, I was stirred by a feeling of regret and pity when I thought how violently I had thrown to the ground the poor wretch who sought my assistance. I knew that his conduct was most reprehensible, that he had abused my kindness a hundred times; but to spurn him, to throw him into the dust! Was it possible that I had really treated him so? That woman's presence, my anger, my humiliated self-esteem, had led my reason astray. What could have become of the poor fellow? He had fallen at my feet without attempting to defend himself, without a complaint; and it seemed to me that I had read only surprise and grief in his eyes, instead of anger. If that other man had had him arrested!—and that seemed to be his intention, for I had not thought of giving him what Ballangier owed him, and that was the first thing that I should have done. How could I find out how the episode had ended?

I looked about; I recognized the place where I was sitting with the three ladies, but there was no one there. The snow had put all the idlers to flight. The people who passed walked rapidly, with their heads down; there were no hucksters, no itinerant singers, nobody to whom I could apply for information. I walked on, but had not taken thirty steps when I saw a man leaning against a large tree, apparently unconscious of the snow that covered his cap and blouse. He stood quite still, but his

eyes were turned in my direction. I walked toward him: it was Ballangier.

He looked at me with a shamefaced, timid expression; when he saw me walking sadly toward him, I fancied that tears glistened in the eyes which no longer dared to meet mine; and when I stood beside him, and was on the point of apologizing for pushing him away so roughly, he fell at my feet, on the snow, and humbly begged my pardon for speaking to me when I was with friends.

Ah! I was no longer angry with him; I made haste to raise him, and shook him by the hand. I believe that my eyes too were moist.

"You forgive me, then?" murmured Ballangier. "I was drunk, you see; I had been drinking; if it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't have spoken to you. I should have remembered that one time a scene almost like this broke off a marriage you had in view.—But you punished me, and you did right; I deserved it. Still, you know, I am little used to such lessons from you. *Dame!* when you threw me down, that sobered me off in an instant. You were in such a rage with me—and you've always been so good-natured before. But you did well; yes, you did well to treat me like that, for it shook me all up. I realized that I was a great scamp, a miserable wretch; that I was always on hand to do you a bad turn, to put you to shame; although I didn't say—no, it don't make any difference how drunk I may be, I'll never say that thing. But I promise you that this will be the last. You'll never have any reason to complain of me again."

"I believe you, Ballangier, I believe you! But your conduct is no excuse for mine. I ought not to have treated you harshly, as I did just now. You were drunk,

and I should have taken pity on your condition. When I think that I pushed you so roughly that you fell, I am terribly angry with myself. Come, give me your hand again, and forgive me for throwing you down."

Ballangier took my hands and effusively pressed them in his, while great tears fell from his eyes and he muttered:

"He asks me to forgive him, after all the mean tricks I've played on him! Oh! you're too good to me, Charles; you ought to beat me—yes, beat me like an old carpet; for I cheated you also about going to Besançon. It is true that I had had a letter from Morillot—you saw the letter, you know; but when you gave me four hundred francs for the journey, I didn't go as I had promised you! I allowed myself to be led away by some of those villainous loafers whom we are foolish enough to call *friends*, when we ought rather to call them *enemies*. What sort of friends are they who can do nothing but drink and carouse and raise the devil in wine shops, who pass their lives in idleness and make sport of steady, hard-working mechanics, and who never cease trying to make us do all sorts of foolish things, so that we may end by being as worthless as they are? With friends like that, a man ought to smash their ribs the first time they give him bad advice; I'm sure that would lessen the number of vagrants that are taken to the Préfecture every week. But that's all over; I'll take my oath, Charles, by all that's holy, that it's all over this time! You won't be obliged again to—push me, as you did just now."

"I believe you, Ballangier; let us forget all that. But tell me—how did you succeed in getting rid of your creditor?"

"Piaulard? Oh, yes! now you remind me of it, it is strange; for I didn't pay him. Well, after you threw me on the ground, where I lay for some time, all dazed like—not that I was hurt at all, but I was dazed by the effect I felt inside of me; I can't describe it—at last I got up, and found everybody had gone, Piaulard with the rest, for I didn't see him again. It's a strange thing, sure enough. I stayed a long while right in the same place, like a dazed man; I don't know what I was thinking about—that is to say, I was looking for you; I was determined to see you and ask your pardon.—Ah! now I remember—a lady came and spoke to me."

"A lady?"

"Yes, yes! Why, I forgot all about her!"

"What was her appearance? Try to remember; draw her portrait for me."

"She was dressed in style, and I think she was rather tall; as for her face, I didn't pay any attention to it. I was still looking for you; I was like a madman; I didn't know what I was doing, but I was calling your name, and I think I was weeping too."

"But what did this lady say? what did she want of you?"

"Wait a minute; I don't just remember what she said. She tried to comfort me, and then—yes, I think she offered me money."

"Money?"

"Yes. I don't know what for, but she said: 'Take this;' and then, faith! I don't know what else she said. All I know is that I told her to let me alone; she interfered with my looking for you. When she saw that I wouldn't answer her, she left me."

"And you didn't take her money?"

"Oh, no! indeed I didn't!"

"That was right, Ballangier; you did right to refuse. Didn't she say anything else to you?"

"Mon Dieu! I didn't listen to her at all. I was looking all the time to see if I could see you pass, and I just said to her: 'Oh! let me look for Charles; you prevent my finding him!'—And she went off."

"Poor fellow! Here, take this; pay your creditor—you owe him twenty-nine francs, I believe—that is, if someone hasn't already taken it upon herself to pay him, as I am inclined to think."

"Someone? Nonsense! who could it be?"

"A person whom you don't know, but I do. However, you must look up this Piaulard, and find out about it. Then go to work, straighten yourself out, make yourself a good workman, and come to see me if you need my help."

"Ah! Charles, I don't deserve to have you make any more sacrifices for me; I am forever annoying and distressing you! Keep the money; I must learn to earn my living at last."

"You will succeed, as soon as you have sincerely made up your mind to do it, I don't doubt. But, meanwhile, I want you to pay your debts and not be left without anything. So, take this; I insist upon it! If by means of your work you should become rich, and I should need to be helped, I would accept without blushing what you offered me."

"What you say puts some heart and courage into me," cried Ballangier, grasping my hand as he spoke. "Help you some day! *Cré coquin!* I should be a proud and happy man then!"

Luckily, my purse was well filled, for I had come out with anticipations of an intrigue. I put eighty francs in

Ballangier's hand. The money had been intended for another purpose; but I began to think that it was better employed so.

I said adieu to Ballangier, who reiterated his oath to turn over a new leaf, and I went home.

I had an idea that it was Madame Dauberny who had paid Piaulard and offered money to Ballangier. Why did she do it? A strange woman that, whom I would have liked right well to understand.

XXX

CONFIDENCE IS OF SLOW GROWTH

Madame Sordeville's behavior after my encounter with Ballangier left me in a morose and melancholy humor, which I was unable to overcome for several days. I would have been glad to see Madame Dauberny, to divert my thoughts. If, while losing my hold upon a pretty woman, I had found a sincere friend, I certainly should not have lost by the exchange. But how was I to see Frédérique? Where could I meet her? Surely I could not go to her house! Strangely enough, I had succeeded in closing the doors of both those ladies; and what had I done to bring about that result? After all, I had no proof that it was Frédérique who had paid Monsieur Piaulard. To write to her on that subject would be a great blunder, even if I were not mistaken; so I concluded to wait until chance should bring us together.

One morning Pomponne appeared, with the mysterious air which he deemed it fitting to assume, even when he

brought me my coat. He leaned over me and said in a low tone:

"Monsieur, that woman who came here some time ago, with something in her apron that I couldn't see—she is outside; she wants to know if she can speak to monsieur."

"What woman? I don't know what you're talking about."

"She said: 'Ask your master if he will see Madame Potrelle.'"

"Madame Potrelle! Idiot! why didn't you tell me her name at once? Certainly I will see her; show her in."

Pomponne seemed sorely perplexed; but he went to the door and said:

"You may come in, Madame Potrelle!"

The concierge from Rue Ménilmontant made her appearance, courtesying profusely. She had her apron rolled up against her breast as before; which fact led me to think that she had again taken the opportunity to give one of her cats a little outing.

I motioned to Monsieur Pomponne to withdraw; which he did regretfully, after a piercing glance at the concierge's apron.

"Excuse me for disturbing you, monsieur," said Madame Potrelle, unrolling her apron, in which, instead of a cat, I discovered several waistcoats and remnants of material. "I've brought back the work you gave my young tenant; it's been done more'n three weeks now; and, you see, when I found you didn't come again—— Do you know it's more'n two months since you sent Madame Landernoy this work?"

"What? is it really so long as that, Madame Potrelle? I am too negligent altogether. But I have had many

things on my mind since, and I may as well admit frankly that I had forgotten my waistcoats."

"Oh! you needn't make any apologies for that, monsieur. *Pardi!* a young man in society must enjoy himself; that's easy to understand. And then, you know, as a usual thing, the seamstresses carry the work back to their customers—the customers don't go after it. That's why I says to our young mother this morning——"

"First of all, how is she? how is the child coming on?"

"Very well, monsieur; little Marie's rather delicate; she's slight, like her mother; but she's growing like a little mushroom. As for Madame Landernoy—you know, you saw her before the baby was born; well, you wouldn't know her to-day. Her cheeks and lips are red again, and her figure's slender and her eyes clear. Oh! she's mighty pretty now, I tell you!"

"So much the better, I am sure!"

"Well, no, monsieur; it ain't so much the better! in fact, she don't like to have people call her pretty."

"Why so, Madame Potrelle? I shall never believe that a woman is sorry to be attractive."

"Well, that's the way it is with her, monsieur; because, since she's got to be so fresh and pretty, it's begun all over again."

"What has begun again?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! the young popinjays running after her."

"When a woman doesn't answer the men who follow her, they soon leave her in peace."

"Sometimes, monsieur, sometimes. But some of 'em stick like leeches. Still, as you say, she don't answer 'em, and when they come and apply to me, as a middle-aged man did not long ago—you ought to see how I

stand 'em off! He offered me ten francs, the blackguard, to let him go upstairs and say two words to Madame Landernoy; he was sure she wouldn't be sorry to have him come; he had a pretty proposal to make to her. 'Monsieur,' says I, standing on my footwarmer to make myself more imposing, 'you take that young woman for what she ain't; and if you don't clear out this minute, I'll throw two cats at your head.' He saw that I had Bribri in one hand and his brother in the other, and he didn't ask for his change. He ran, and I guess he's running still."

"Very well done, Madame Potrelle! I see that your cats may serve a useful purpose on occasion."

"My cats! Why, monsieur, there's Mahon, the oldest one—he's every bit as good as a Newfoundland."

"Did the man you speak of come again?"

"Never. As you said, you can sweep out such fellows as that very quick. But about a week ago, the poor woman came into the house in a terrible fright, trembling all over. She rushed into my place, and said: 'Protect me! don't let him come in here, or I am lost!'"

"Mon Dieu! whom had she seen? Her seducer, probably; that wretch who treated her so horribly!"

"I don't think it was him; for his name's Ernest, and that wasn't the name she said. 'He dares to pursue me again, the monster!'—Anyway, she had a terrible scare, for she hasn't dared to put her foot outdoors since that day."

"And she said nothing else?"

"No, monsieur; when I tried to ask her what had scared her so, she said: 'Oh! don't say anything more about it, Madame Potrelle; he's a villain who did me a great injury; but you mustn't let anybody come up to my room, and I shan't go out again for some time.'—Now,

monsieur, I'm coming back to your waistcoats. As I have a shrewd knack of guessing when the waters are low—that is to say, when money is scarce, without being told, I says this morning to our young mother, while she was dandling the little girl on her lap: 'But,' I says, 'you have some work here that you finished long ago: Monsieur Rochebrune's waistcoats.'—I took the liberty of mentioning your name, monsieur, because I know it from you giving me your address; and you didn't say anything about keeping it secret."

"No, Madame Potrelle; I told you that I had no reason for concealing my name, for I have no evil designs. Go on."

"'The waistcoats are done, that's true,' says Madame Landernoy, 'but I don't know if the gentleman will be satisfied. I did my very best; but as he don't come to get them——' 'Well,' I says, 'as he don't come to get them, why shouldn't we take 'em to him? It seems to me, that would be more polite, for he's rather a dandy, and he wouldn't want to carry a bundle.'—'Perhaps you're right,' she says, thoughtful like; 'but one thing's certain; I won't go to that gentleman's house.'—Do you see? she's still afraid—yes, she's still afraid of you! In spite of all I could say about you, she couldn't believe you would take an interest in her without some motive. You mustn't be angry, monsieur, for, as the proverb says: 'A burnt child dreads the fire.'"

"It doesn't anger me at all, Madame Potrelle; the better one knows the world, the more fully one realizes how hard it is to inspire confidence. That is sad, like almost all truths."

"So, then, monsieur, I offered to bring you the waistcoats; she was more than willing, and here I am. If monsieur wants to examine the work—here's the pattern."

I looked at what the woman had brought me, and was perfectly amazed at the exquisite quality of the work. I had intended the waistcoats for my servant; but they were as fine as if they had come from one of our most famous tailors.

"The buttonholes are pretty well made, seems to me," said the concierge; "but perhaps monsieur don't agree with me?"

"Indeed I do, Madame Potrelle; and I can't understand how that young woman can have succeeded so well with work that she isn't accustomed to."

"Oh! *dame!* it's because she was bound to satisfy monsieur. Now, you must see if they fit you all right."

I tried on the waistcoats; we were compelled to admit that there was a defect in the way they were cut; they gaped apart at the top. The poor concierge walked round and round me, crying:

"I'm sure it's a small matter, just a little bit to be taken in somewhere; but we must find out where. If our young woman could see 'em on you, I'll bet she'd know in a minute what needs to be done."

"I should be very glad to go to her room and try them on; but she's so afraid of me! No matter! I'll keep them as they are."

"No, monsieur, no; I don't propose to have her send you work that ain't done right; you pay too well."

"By the way, how much do I owe for these?"

"I don't know, monsieur. Madame Landernoy's never made any before; so she says: 'Let the gentleman pay what he thinks they're worth, and I'll be satisfied.'"

"Four waistcoats, at twelve francs each, makes forty-eight francs."

"Oh! monsieur is joking! Twelve francs for making a waistcoat! You can't mean that, monsieur! At that rate, all women would be waistcoat makers; they can't get any such pay as that."

"You weary me with your scruples, Madame Potrelle; my tailor charges me eighteen or twenty francs, sometimes more, for a waistcoat. With what I paid for the material, these won't cost any more than that, and I certainly don't propose to get them any cheaper."

"Sapristi! monsieur, tailors must do mighty well, then! All right, you can pay that price, since that suits you; but, I tell you, I won't take the money till they fit."

Thereupon the concierge walked toward the door.

"Where are you going, Madame Potrelle?"

"I'm going to tell our young woman she must fix over your waistcoats, monsieur; that they're a gold mine, but that she's got to take 'em in a little. In a word, I'm going to bring Madame Landernoy back with me. What the devil! with me here, she won't be afraid of you eating her, I fancy! To be on your guard is all right; but there's no need of making a fool of yourself! I'll be back, monsieur."

"But your door, Madame Potrelle?"

"My cats are there—and my little niece."

The good woman went away, refusing to listen to my remonstrances. Would she bring Mignonne back with her? I most sincerely hoped that the young woman would not be annoyed thereat. My desire to know her better was due solely to my wish to be of use to her. I was not in love with her. Indeed, since Madame Sordeville had treated me so shamefully, I did not propose to love any woman. That was my intention, at least.

Madame Potrelle had been gone nearly two hours, and I was preparing to go out, thinking that she would not return, when there came a gentle ring at my door, and Pomponne soon appeared, still with his air of mystery and walking on tiptoe, and said:

"Monsieur, it's the old woman who was here just now; she hasn't got anything in her apron this time, but she's brought with her a young woman—or demoiselle—who is very good-looking."

I could not help laughing at Monsieur Pomponne's reflections; but I remembered Mignonne's extreme suspicion. It was essential that I should assume a serious bearing, to banish from her mind any thought of seduction. So that my expression was almost stern when I ordered Pomponne to admit my visitors.

Madame Potrelle entered first. Mignonne came behind her, with a timid, embarrassed air, in which one could read a serious and studied reserve. The concierge had not exaggerated when she said that her tenant had become a lovely woman. It was a long time since I had seen Mignonne, and I am not sure that I should have recognized her. She was remarkable for the refinement of her features, for the beauty of her coloring, which was not red, but a delicate pink, perfectly in harmony with her white skin; for her fair hair, which was neither colorless nor of too pronounced a tone; and, lastly, for the genuine *blueness* of her eyes—a thing that is seldom seen, for most eyes that are called blue are of any color you please except that.

And then, there was in Mignonne's whole aspect a touch of melancholy that made her doubly interesting, because it was in no wise affected; it seemed to me that everyone must, at sight of her, have a feeling of sympathy

for her. Perhaps it was because I was acquainted with her misfortunes that I thought so. This much is certain: that, as I looked upon her, I was touched, deeply moved, and that in my feelings there was nothing resembling love, or the desires to which the sight of a pretty girl often gives birth. There was a large element of respect in the interest that she aroused in me.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Madame Potrelle, pushing Mignonne in front of her. "Here's Madame Landernoy; I told her there was something to be done to your waistcoats, with which you are well satisfied, all the same."

"I regret the trouble you have taken, madame. However, it affords me the opportunity of congratulating you on the perfection of your work. I was fortunate in having you consent to work for me."

I said this in a very cold tone and without fixing my eyes on Mignonne, who seemed to grow a little bolder and replied:

"But your waistcoats don't fit, monsieur——"

"Oh! I think that it's a very small matter; you are not a tailor, and, of course, you could not succeed in doing everything just right at the first trial; but if you will allow me to try on one of them in your presence——"

"*Pardi!* of course you must try 'em on," cried the concierge; "there's no other way to see what's wrong! and, after all, a waistcoat's different from a pair of breeches!"

Mignonne lowered her eyes at Madame Potrelle's remark. I removed my coat and put on one of the waistcoats. Mignonne had no choice but to come to me and touch my chest and back, like a tailor taking my measure. But while she was making her examination, I was careful not to look at her once; so that she was somewhat reassured.

"I see what needs to be done, monsieur: the collar is too low; it's not much to do, and then I think they'll fit very well. I will take them away with me, and to-morrow——"

She hesitated, and I made haste to say:

"I shall not be here to-morrow, but that makes no difference; if you bring the waistcoats back, be good enough to leave them with the concierge; you need not take the trouble to come up."

"Yes, monsieur," she murmured, almost smiling, for she was beginning to feel altogether at her ease. Madame Potrelle looked at her with a triumphant expression.

I offered Mignonne the money that I owed her. She looked at it and said:

"What, monsieur, as much as that—for so little work? It's too much, monsieur!"

"Madame," I said, rather sharply, "I have told Madame Potrelle what I have to pay my tailor for a waistcoat. I do not intend to make you a present; but, on the other hand, I don't propose to have anyone think that I am trying to defraud a poor seamstress."

"Don't you go to work and make monsieur angry!" cried the concierge. "As he's in the habit of paying that price, what's the use of vexing him and putting him in a bad humor? you mustn't go against people's grain like that!"

Mignonne said nothing; but she took the money I offered, and made a very modest courtesy. For the first time she looked at me without a suspicious expression in her eyes.

"Now," I said, "will you allow me to make you a proposition, madame? You may accept it or not, as you think best. But, first of all, pray be seated for a moment; and you too, Madame Potrelle."

The concierge did not wait to be urged. The younger woman made more ado about it; her suspicions were reawakened. She waited to hear what I had to say.

"I am a bachelor; I have none of the kind-hearted female relations, no aunts or cousins, who condescend sometimes to cast an eye over a young man's linen closet, where there is always something that needs mending. Our clothes especially are sadly neglected; indeed, no care at all is taken of them. The result is that we spend much more money than we need to spend, which would not happen if some trustworthy person, some skilful seamstress, like yourself, madame, would take charge of affairs. This, then, is my proposition: that you should come once a week—with Madame Potrelle—and inspect this chest of drawers in which my linen is kept; carry away what may need to be mended, and bring it back when it is done; in short, madame, that you should keep this part of my establishment in order. If you are afraid of disturbing me, or of finding company here, come about five o'clock in the afternoon, for I am never at home at that time; the keys are always in these drawers, and my servant will have orders to allow you to do as you please. That is what I propose, madame. As for your compensation for the work, I fancy that we shall have no difficulty on that subject."

Mignonne listened to me with close attention. Madame Potrelle was in ecstasies; she could hardly keep her seat, and did nothing but cross and uncross her legs. At last, after reflection, the young woman replied:

"Really, monsieur, I do not know how I have earned the confidence with which you honor me. What you propose is a new proof of your kindness, and——"

"No, no, madame; pray consider that, by undertaking this work, you will do me a real service; you will bring

order, and consequently economy, into my housekeeping. So you see that I shall be your debtor. Well! do you accept?"

"Does she accept!" cried Madame Potrelle, springing up as if she were going to dance. "Why, who ever heard of refusing such an offer as that? a thing that makes her sure of regular work; especially when she sees that it's for a gentleman who—for someone who hasn't any desire to—why, it's as plain as can be!"

"Yes, monsieur, I accept, and with gratitude," said Mignonne; "for I have a child, and by giving the mother assurance of a living you benefit the child no less."

I would have liked to shake hands with her; but I restrained myself, and replied, with the same indifferent air:

"In that case, madame, it is all settled, and it rests with you to say when you will enter upon your duties. You will have work enough, I promise you, for it's a long time since my belongings have been put in order."

"Then, monsieur, as I have nothing to do just now, I'll carry a bundle of linen home with me, by your leave. I'll look it over at home, for I have left my daughter with a neighbor, and I don't like to abuse her good nature."

"That's so," said the concierge; "and I ain't very easy in my mind about the actions of my twins and their sister."

"Do as you please, madame. Just open those drawers; you will find the bed and table linen in this closet."

Mignonne opened one of the drawers in the commode, and hastily made up a bundle, which she wrapped carefully in a handkerchief. She was still engaged in that occupation, when I heard my doorbell, and a moment later a familiar voice in the reception room.

"There's no need of announcing me, my boy; I'll go right in without ceremony. A doctor may always go in."

At the same instant, the bedroom door opened and Balloquet appeared.

"Bonjour, my dear fellow!" he said; "I beg your pardon; I interrupt you, perhaps. But if I intrude, tell me so, and I'll go away."

I had just taken Balloquet's hand, and told him to remain, when Mignonne, who had made haste to tie up her bundle, and was about to leave the room with Madame Potrelle, glanced at the new-comer and suddenly changed color; then, trembling with agitation, she threw her bundle on the floor, seized the old woman's arm, and cried:

"Come, come, madame! Let us go at once; I can't stay here another minute! Oh! it's shameful! It was a trap!"

"Well, well! what makes you throw all that linen on the floor? Why don't you carry it away?" murmured the old woman, aghast at Mignonne's action.

"I won't take the work. I refuse it! I'll never come here again, never! never! Come, madame! let us go at once!"

As she spoke, the young woman ran to the door and went out, refusing to listen to what her companion said; and she, utterly unable to understand what she saw, decided to follow her, crying:

"What on earth's the matter with her? What's got into her? Refuse work, when she needs it! Refuse the offers of an honorable man, who wishes her nothing but good! Faith! it's sickening! Much good it does to take an interest in folks! Excuse me, monsieur, I must follow her; but she's got to explain all this. Excuse

her, monsieur; it's some crazy idea she's got in her head. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! to refuse a gentleman like monsieur—there's no sense in it!"

The concierge left the room at last. As for myself, I was so thunderstruck by Mignonne's conduct that it had not occurred to me to ask her for an explanation.

Balloquet, meanwhile, had remained standing in the middle of the room, looking from one to another, unable to understand what was taking place.

"Well! what in the deuce is going on here, my dear fellow?" said the young doctor, when Madame Potrelle had disappeared. "Can it be that my arrival caused all this hurly-burly and put that young woman to flight? She seemed to be a very attractive person—not the one who went out last, but the other. I didn't have time for a good look at her, but she struck me as rather *chicolo*."

"You didn't recognize her, then, Balloquet?"

"Recognize her? Why, do I know her? I have no remembrance of ever seeing her."

"Ah! I see, I see; I understand it all now."

"You are very lucky, for I don't understand a word of it."

I remembered that Balloquet had been Fouvenard's friend, and it was probable that Mignonne had met him when she was with her seducer; and so, when she saw a man come into my room whom she had seen with him who had deceived her so shamefully, she concluded, doubtless, that I too was a friend of Fouvenard. That being so, was it surprising that her suspicions and her terror should have returned, and that she should have refused to work for me? Poor girl! I had succeeded in winning her confidence, and this accident had destroyed all that I had had so much difficulty in obtaining. It

seemed that, with the best intentions, I was fated always to remain an object of terror to her.

I kept my reflections to myself; I deemed it unnecessary to tell Balloquet that the young woman he had found in my room was she whose shame Monsieur Fouvenard had not hesitated to proclaim. My visitor was still standing in the middle of the room, and he cried at last, irritated by my silence:

"Evidently I came at an inopportune moment. Excuse me. I'll come again."

But I detained him and made him sit down.

"No; you could never guess—— But let us say no more about this incident.—You seem in better spirits, my dear Balloquet?"

"Oh! my feathers are coming out again; not enough to pay you, but that may come in time."

"For heaven's sake, don't talk about that!"

"I have seen Satiné, my sweetheart, again. She has gone into another invention now—still in the glove line, however. She cleanses gloves; she has invented, or someone has given her, a secret for cleansing them; and as gloves get soiled very quickly and are rather expensive, there's a lot of money to be made in cleansing."

"True; but I thought the process was already known."

"Yes, it is possible to have gloves cleansed; that's so; but when they had been through the process they smelt of the cleansing liquid—turpentine, or something else. You went into a salon and swaggered about, playing the dandy, and people said as soon as you came near: 'Ah! here's a man whose gloves have been cleansed!'—That was annoying, you must admit. It took fifty per cent off your costume. Some people concluded at once that your coat had been turned and your trousers dyed,

that your waistcoat was second-hand, etcetera, etcetera. Conjectures went a long way, sometimes."

"And your charmer has found a way of avoiding that?"

"Yes—that is to say, not altogether; gloves cleansed by her process have an extremely pleasant odor; they smell of rose; oh! you can smell them a mile away; it's amazing! You go into a salon, and people think that the Grand Turk and his whole harem have arrived; they can't smell anything but you."

"But that may have the same drawbacks as the other process, my dear fellow. People will wonder why you smell so strongly of rose."

"Yes; but when I arrive, I shall begin by saying: 'I adore the odor of rose! I have lately bought some essence of rose, so strong that all my clothes are perfumed with it.'—In that way, I avert suspicion from my gloves. However, it seems that the new process is a success. My sentimental Satiné is in funds; the odor of rose is popular. For my part, I have had a few patients —among others, a rich old gentleman with whom I am very well satisfied; he has had an inflammation of the lungs for six weeks, and it doesn't seem inclined to subside. I keep it up by means of fumigations. I have paid three creditors already with that inflammation. To-day, as I happened to be in your neighborhood, I said to myself: 'I may as well call on Rochebrune and give him my address;' for I have an address for the moment. Cité Vindé, No. 4, *ter* or *bis*. But I'm very sorry that I put that young woman to flight. Have I such a very terrifying aspect? I haven't any moustache."

"I repeat, Balloquet, don't think any more of that incident. You could not have foreseen what happened.

—But tell me about that girl who came to consult you while I was in your room; you remember, don't you? the girl who had been so maltreated by a miserable blackguard!"

Balloquet passed his hand across his brow and his face became almost serious—a rare occurrence.

"Yes, I remember; you mean Annette?"

"Annette—that was the name. You went to see her, didn't you?"

"Yes, I visited her nearly two months."

"And then?"

"And then happened what I had anticipated from the very first: she died."

"Died! Great God! you could not save her?"

"It was impossible. All that I could do was to relieve her suffering as much as possible. Poor girl! she suffered too much, even then. A cancer developed, you understand, at that place. I say again, I deadened the pain as much as I could, but it was impossible to save her."

"It is perfectly ghastly. So the unfortunate child was tortured—yes, murdered by that—— Oh! the infernal scoundrel! the monster!"

"Yes, it was that Bouqueton who caused the poor girl's death; I am ready to testify to it, if necessary. But you told me, I believe, that you know the villain?"

"I don't know him, but I know who he is."

"Well, is there no way of avenging the poor creature, of punishing her assassin?—for the man is an assassin, and a hundred times more criminal than those who ply their trade openly on the highroad. If we prosecuted him before the courts, we should have no chance of proving his crime, I fancy. The victim is dead, and there

is no evidence. I asked her several times if she had not some letter, or something that came from that Bouqueton; it would have been invaluable. But all that she had was a paltry ring, of no value, not even gold, which he gave her one day as being very valuable."

"Have you seen the ring?"

"Yes; I asked Annette for it several days before she died. The poor child, who had divined her doom, although I did my best to conceal it from her, gave me the bauble, and said with angelic gentleness: 'You may intend to search for the man who injured me so, and punish him; but it isn't worth while, monsieur; after all, I have only received the reward of my misconduct. If I hadn't left my parents to lead a disorderly life, this thing wouldn't have happened to me. I see that I've got to die, but I forgive the man who caused my death."

"Poor Annette!"

"I concealed my intentions from her, but I took the ring. It's all right for the victim to forgive—but our duty is to punish. This is the ring, Rochebrune."

Balloquet took from his pocket a little gold-plated ring, with several colored stones of no value set in the form of a star; its only merit was that it was easily identified by its oddity and its ugliness. I took possession of it eagerly, crying:

"Leave it with me, my friend; let me keep it, I beg you; it will help me some day to avenge poor Annette."

"With all my heart. But I say again, try to let me have a share in the vengeance; don't forget me when the time comes. I saw the victim die, and I should enjoy seeing the murderer punished."

"I promise to let you know at once, when the time comes; and if I need you to help me——"

"Sapristi! I will be on hand then, even if I am pursued by creditors! But my affairs will be settled in due time. Au revoir, my dear fellow! The next time I come to see you, I'll wear a pair of my essence of rose gloves, so that you can tell your friends and acquaintances about them."

Balloquet shook hands with me and took his leave; and I carefully put poor Annette's ring away in my desk.

XXXI

DISAPPOINTED HOPES

Annette's death and Mignonne's unjust suspicions of me left me in a melancholy mood; and when, as sometimes happened, Madame Sordeville's conduct came to my mind, it did not tend to restore my self-contentment. I was not precisely unhappy, but I was disgusted to think that I had so misplaced my affections; and, more than all, I craved other affection. Can a man live without love, at thirty years? Indeed, I believe, with Voltaire, that love is necessary at every age, and that it is love that sustains us.

I was in this frame of mind when Madame Potrelle appeared. The good woman began with her usual profusion of reverences, and with an abundance of apologies for the abrupt manner of her departure on the occasion of her last visit; but she hoped that I bore her no ill will therefor.

I reassured her, and asked if she was sent by Madame Landernoy.

"Oh, no, monsieur! she didn't send me—that is to say, not exactly; but she knows I've come. I'll bet she's waiting impatiently for my return; and yet, worse luck! she won't listen to a word about you; she won't work for you; she wouldn't put her foot inside your door for —I don't know what! She's wrong; I'm perfectly sure she's doing wrong, and that she's mistaken in what she thinks about you. So I came to tell you what it was that frightened her, what turned her head."

"I suspect what it was, Madame Potrelle. But, no matter, tell me what you know."

"In the first place, monsieur, as I told you, when she came back from buying provisions a week or two ago, my young tenant rushed into my place, frightened to death, and singing out: 'Protect me! don't let him come in!'"

"Yes; and afterward a middle-aged man offered you ten francs to let him go up to Madame Landernoy's room."

"Yes, monsieur; but that last one was just one of the men who are always following women. But, for all that, it seems he was in earnest, and he watched her a long while after, poor child. When men are—on my word, they're worse'n tomcats. Excuse the comparison, monsieur; I don't mean that for you."

"Let us come to what you had to tell me, Madame Potrelle."

"You see, a woman ends by getting confused with all these blackguards. *Dame!* she's got to be so pretty again! I didn't lie to you about that, did I, monsieur?"

"Your tenant is very good-looking. Above all, she has an interesting, respectable look, which ought to protect her from the schemes of seekers after adventures."

"Oh, no! not at all, monsieur; just the opposite! Libertines run after virtuous women most of all. They want 'em! they must have 'em! 'Ah!' they'll say; 'there's one that's never gone wrong; I'll just push her down into perdition.'—Excuse me; I'll come back to the point. The other day, when Madame Landernoy went out of here like a rocket, I ran after her, and, *dame!* as I didn't think she'd done right, I asked her to explain herself; and this is what she said, word for word: 'I was right in not having confidence in Monsieur Rochebrune; I recognized that young man who just came in as a friend of my seducer, of the man who wasn't content with deserting me, but tried to cover me with shame. Now, nothing will take away my idea that Monsieur Rochebrune is one of Ernest's friends, too. How do I know that they are not planning some trap that they mean to lead me into? When I came home in such a fright two or three days ago, it was because I'd met that horrible Rambertin—the man who conceived and carried out the most outrageous treachery! And that man ran after me and dared to talk to me again about his passion! No, Madame Potrelle, I won't go to Monsieur Rochebrune's again, and I won't work for him; for all that he's doing for me isn't natural. Besides, I am sure now that he has seen Ernest, and that's enough to make me feel something worse than fear of him.'—Those are Madame Landernoy's very words, monsieur. I stood up for you; I told her that it wasn't possible that you had any hand in wicked schemes against her; and that I'd put my hand in the fire to prove it—and so I would!"

"I thank you for your good opinion of me, Madame Potrelle, and I assure you that I deserve it in this matter."

"Oh! I don't doubt it, monsieur. But the young woman's got that idea in her brain, and there's no way to get it out. But something came into my head, and I told her of it. 'You think,' I says, 'that Monsieur Rochebrune's a friend of your seducer, and you think it's strange he should take so much interest in you and pay you more for your work than it's worth. But how do you know Monsieur Ernest hasn't repented of the way he's treated you? After all, he's the father of your little girl; how do you know but what he's thinking about her, and wants her to have everything she needs?' —That seemed to strike her; she thought a long while, and then she says: 'Oh, no! no! when a man has tried to cover an unhappy mother with shame, he don't repent! his heart is closed to every honest feeling, and he never remembers that he has a child. And yet, if by any chance—if you have guessed right—— But, no, I can't believe it, it isn't possible!'—At that, monsieur, I saw that in the bottom of her heart she thought I had guessed right; so I says to her: 'Well! I'll just go to Monsieur Rochebrune, and ask him flat-footed how it is, and I'm sure he'll answer me honest.'—So I started off, monsieur, and here I am."

"You did well, madame, to believe that I would answer you frankly. You may repeat what I am going to tell you to Mignonne—that is her Christian name, and she will understand now how I know it.—I do know Monsieur Ernest Fouvenard; he has never been a friend of mine; and if he had been, his treatment of your tenant, of which he dared to boast in my presence, would have been enough to put an end to our friendship. In fact, that is just what has happened between him and the young man whom you saw here. He was intimate with

Monsieur Ernest; he broke with him entirely as soon as he learned of this outrageous performance of his. I was profoundly interested by Mignonne's misfortunes; and that interest was absolutely pure, as I did not then know her. I understand why she looked upon me at first with suspicion; when one has been so shamefully betrayed, it is natural to suspect evil designs in the most innocent actions. I saw your young tenant, and I did not fall in love with her—not even after she recovered her beauty. But she aroused the liveliest interest in me, and it would have been a very pleasant task to me to make her lot easier. That is the whole truth; I hope that Mignonne will deign to believe it. As a general rule, men are evil-minded; but there are still some who do good solely for the pleasure of doing it; the exception proves the rule."

"I believe you, monsieur; oh, yes! I believe you," said the concierge, sadly; "but I am sorry that I didn't guess right. I wish that miserable Monsieur Ernest had thought of his child. Whatever she may say, I am sure the poor mother would have been pleased in the bottom of her heart."

"I am not enough of a hero, Madame Potrelle, to give credit to another for the little good I am able to do; besides, when that other is a miserable wretch, a dastard, who prides himself on his infamous conduct, it seems to me that it would be nothing less than downright fraud to give him credit for acts which would imply that his heart was not devoid of every worthy feeling. Mignonne was right in thinking that the man who would have covered an unhappy mother with opprobrium is not capable of repentance. Your supposition was born of a kind heart; but Monsieur Ernest has one that is rotten

to the core, and with such hearts there is no resource. Now, I have told you the whole truth; Mignonne will believe me or not; I cannot help myself. But if she does change her opinion with regard to me, tell her that I bear no malice, and that the work I offered her will still be at her disposal."

I dismissed the concierge. Let Mignonne think and do what she chose, I had done all that I could to help her. I neither could nor ought to go any further.

The spring had returned, and one fine day I had left home thinking of Madame Dauberny, whom I would have given all the world to meet, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned, and recognized my former acquaintance, Baron von Brunzbrack.

"How in der teufel are you?" said the baron, taking my hand.

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur de Brunzbrack? I am delighted to meet you. Do you know that it is more than six months since we met?"

"Ja, I know id vell; but I could not meed you no more, pecause—you know pecause vhy?"

"What do I know? Assume that I do not know—I shall be much obliged."

"Pecause I no longer go to Monsir Sordeville."

"Ah! you no longer go there? Faith! I had no means of knowing that, for the very simple reason that I myself have not put my foot inside that door since—yes, since the night we played baccarat together, against Madame Dauberny."

"Ten you pe like me. Te loafely voman, she vill haf varned us poth."

"Warned—— Who, pray?"

"Te loafely Frédérique."

"Ah! so Madame Dauberny suggested to you too not to go to Madame Sordeville's, did she?"

"Ja! I haf one day received from her ein leedle note, vich I haf alvays keep, pecause I vas much bleezed to receive tat note vich she haf write herself. You shall see; I haf id alvays on my heart, in my cigar case."

And the baron, taking a dainty cigar case from his pocket, produced a small folded paper that smelt horribly of tobacco; luckily, the tobacco was of the best quality.

He opened the letter and handed it to me, but did not let it leave his own hands. I recognized Frédérique's hand, and I read:

"My Dear Baron:

"Do you care for my advice? Do not go to Monsieur Sordeville's any more. I say this in your own interest. Later, perhaps, I shall be able to explain my reasons.

"Yours devotedly,

"Frédérique Dauberny."

I could not restrain a sort of shudder as I read the last name, and reflected that such a woman as Frédérique was that man's wife. Suppose that she knew what he was doing! But, no; she would do something imprudent; it was better that she should not know that story until Annette was avenged.

The baron carefully replaced the letter in his cigar case, and restored the latter to his pocket, saying:

"Vhen I haf tat note received, I vas mad mit choy. I pelieved tat te Frédérique, she vas chealous of some voman who vent to Monsir Sordeville, berhaps of Montame Sordeville herself. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Did you follow the advice she gave you?"

"Ach! *pigre!* I vould haf no more gone to Sordeville's for ein embire! But I haf called often to see Montame Dauberny; I haf hard luck; she pe nefer in! I haf not pin aple to meed her. And you, mein gut frent?"

"I received the same advice from Madame Dauberny."

"And you opeyed, like me?"

"Not instantly; I went once more to see Madame Sordeville, but in the afternoon."

"Ach! gut! gut!"

"Indeed, I expected to see her often; but an unforeseen event changed all my plans. I have not been there since, and I shall never go again."

"Ach! gut! gut! Is id also to do Montame Dauberny's vish?"

"Not at all; it is for another reason, which I cannot tell you."

"Gut! gut! I no untershtand. You must not—you must not shtill pe in loafe mit te peautiful Frédérique?"

"Mon Dieu! no, my dear baron! When could I have fallen in love with her, pray? I never see her; I never meet her."

"Gif me your hand, mein frent."

"And yet, I confess that I have the greatest desire to see her and speak with her."

"Ach, ja! I untershtand; and so haf I; to ask her vhy she haf forbid us to go to te Sordevilles."

"I should not be sorry to know that. But I want to talk to her about something which interests me more."

The baron drew back with a frown, and muttered:

"You haf a teclaration to make to her—in secret—mit mystery!"

"Sapristi! you are infernally tenacious in your ideas, baron. Once more, there is no question of a declaration!

Why on earth have you taken it into your head that I am likely to fall in love with Madame Dauberny? Would it please you very much if I should?"

"Ach! no! no! Gif me your hand, mein frent; I haf pin wrong. I am one pig fool!"

The baron was still holding my hand, when a calèche stopped beside us and a voice said:

"Would you like to take a short drive with me, messieurs?"

We looked up and recognized Madame Dauberny, alone in an open calèche. Herr von Brunzbrack turned crimson with pleasure; for my part, I was well pleased to have met Frédérique at last.

"Faith! madame," said I, "the baron and I were just talking of you."

"Ja, loafely lady; ve haf pin talking of you."

"I suspected as much; that is why I stopped. Well, messieurs, wouldn't you rather talk with me than confine yourselves to talking about me?"

Our only reply was to enter the carriage without more ado. I seated myself opposite Frédérique, the baron by her side, and we drove away.

XXXII

A REVELATION

Unless by keeping my eyes constantly lowered, I could not avoid looking often at Frédérique; and as I had no reason to lower my eyes, and, moreover, as I had always taken pleasure in looking at her, I was able at that moment to enjoy that pleasure to the full.

Madame Dauberny was always dressed in good taste; that morning she wore a gray silk gown, cut very high, which was wonderfully becoming to her. But, after all, is it not rather the wearer who embellishes the gown? For example: I had often noticed that Frédérique's waists fitted her to perfection, and I had rarely noticed that fact in other women. Was it not because Frédérique had a beautiful figure?

I was overjoyed to see that Madame Dauberny's face no longer wore that cold, stern expression which she had formerly adopted with me. Her face was entirely different; I could not say what it expressed, because, although she looked at me often, she never fixed her eyes on mine; but they shone with a brilliancy I had never before seen in them; they were at once softer and merrier than of old; they no longer had, for the moment at least, that ironical or severe expression to which I had once become accustomed.

The baron, who seemed enchanted at first to be at Frédérique's side, soon began, I think, to be sorry that he was not where I was. He constantly leaned forward, trying to see Frédérique's face; but she wore a

broad-brimmed gray felt hat, and when the baron leaned forward to speak to her she always turned her head, apparently in a spirit of mischief, so that he could not have the pleasure of looking at her.

"I am very glad to have met you, messieurs," said Frédérique; "in the first place, because it gives me the greatest pleasure to see you—both."

That *both* she said in a curious tone, and accompanied it with a glance in my direction. I had sufficient conceit to believe, after all, that she still preferred my company to the baron's.

"In the second place, messieurs, I owe you an explanation for the letters I wrote you on the subject of Monsieur Sordeville; for I referred to him solely, and not to his wife, when I urged you to break off your relations with that household. Monsieur Rochebrune paid little heed to my advice.—I do not blame you, monsieur; besides, Armantine is my friend, and, as I have told you before, I have no desire to injure her in your esteem. If her husband is a scoundrel, I believe you to be just enough not to include his wife in the contempt which that man must inspire."

"Go on, madame; what is his business?"

"Haf he made ein pankrupt?"

"Oh! if it were no worse than that! But, in the first place, Monsieur Sordeville was neither banker, nor merchant, nor solicitor; he was nothing, and pretended to be everything. That strange state of affairs aroused my curiosity more than once, especially as he gave parties, lived handsomely, made a good deal of show, and yet he was not known to have any fortune, and Armantine's dowry was very, very small. There is one point upon which I have always liked to be well posted, and that

is, the means of existence of the people with whom I associate. Indeed, how much confidence can one have in those who spend a great deal and earn nothing?

"I had several times been tempted to say a word of warning to Armantine on that subject; but she did not trouble herself in the least about her husband's business, and had unbounded faith in what he told her. She led such a life as she liked; for her husband left her entirely at liberty to do just what she chose, and seemed happy to be the husband of a charming woman, only because she attracted numerous guests to his house. You will agree that it would have been horrible to disturb Armantine's peace of mind by giving her a hint of my suspicions; she would have spurned them with horror. Poor woman! More than once, I said to myself that I was a fool, that my ideas were an insult to Monsieur Sordeville; and not until I had learned of several facts that confirmed my suspicions, did I feel absolutely certain of the truth."

"Not yet do I know vat is te trut," muttered the baron, craning his neck in an attempt to see his neighbor's lovely eyes.

"Ah! Monsieur de Brunzbrack, there are some things that are so hard, so painful, to say! Listen: about a year ago, a young man attached to the Dutch legation was suddenly dismissed, without the slightest explanation of his disgrace. He had been an habitué of Monsieur Sordeville's salon for two months. A clerk in the War Department lost his place—no reason assigned. But he, too, had attended Monsieur Sordeville's receptions. And you yourself, baron—did not your ambassador thank you and request you never to set foot in his offices again?"

"Ja! Te ambassador, he haf say to me: 'You talk too much! You haf divulzhe te secrets of te cabinet.'—I

haf not untershtand, but id vas all one to me; I haf not care for my blace."

"How is it with you, Monsieur Rochebrune? do you begin to understand?"

"In truth, madame, I fear that I do; but I dare not say as yet."

"Well, monsieur, the young attaché of the Dutch legation had been lured on by Monsieur Sordeville to talk foolishly about certain plans of his government.—You did the same, baron, unwittingly perhaps; that man was so clever at making people talk about what he wanted to find out! As for the young clerk, he had tattled about certain peculiarities of his superiors, and Monsieur Sordeville took care that they were informed. In a word, Monsieur Sordeville was connected with the secret police. That is what I dared not believe at first, what I was determined to have the proof of, if it were true. I never hesitate when the honor of a friend, the safety and the future of people I love, are at stake. I had once rendered a slight service to a person who is employed in the police bureau to-day, but in a position which he can afford to avow; that person had begged me to give him an opportunity to show his gratitude, and I said to him: 'The opportunity has come; find out for me what Monsieur Sordeville's position is.' I speedily received a reply containing these words only: 'Connected with the secret police.'"

"*Sapremann!*" cried the baron; "I am sorry tat I haf talk mit him! Vat! tat so bolite monsir—he vas ein shpy! Ach! I am shtubefied!"

I shared the baron's stupefaction; Frédérique's revelation appalled me; and yet, I knew that in society the most disgusting vices lie hidden beneath the most brilliant exteriors.

"And—his wife," I said at last; "does she know now what her husband does?"

"She knows all, and I was spared the melancholy duty of telling her. There were some scandalous scenes at Monsieur Sordeville's not long ago. It seems that a certain man—one of the victims of that wretch's denunciations—had succeeded, by unwearying perseverance, in learning the source of the report that ruined him. He also learned the truth with respect to Monsieur Sordeville. Then what did he do? Accompanied by several friends, to whom he had told the facts, he went to the house on a certain evening at home—for they continued to receive, notwithstanding what was told you to the contrary."

This was said to me, and proved that Frédérique knew all.

"He went to Monsieur Sordeville's," she continued, "and there, in the middle of the salon, before all the guests, he called him a spy and struck him! Imagine the uproar, the amazement, the confusion, of all those people, who were thoroughly ashamed to be there; for Monsieur Sordeville turned pale, and did not say a word or return the blow. Poor Armantine fainted, and they carried her to her room. Thereupon the guests all took their hats and fled, assuring the master of the house that they didn't believe a word of what had been said, but fully determined never to go there again. On the next day, Armantine took refuge with me. I dictated the following plainly worded letter, which she sent to her husband:

"'You have deceived me shamefully, monsieur. I leave you, and I lay aside your name. You will never hear of me again, and I trust that I may never hear of you.'

"That is what Armantine wrote to him. You must agree, Rochebrune, that we are not very fortunate in our husbands, either of us!"

Poor Frédérique! She did not know how truly she spoke.

"Now, messieurs, it's all over. The Sordeville family has ceased to exist. Nobody knows what has become of the man, and nobody cares very much. Probably he is still carrying on his profession, on his own account. As to Armantine, luckily she has about eighteen hundred francs a year which her husband cannot touch. She will live on that, in the retreat she has chosen; she will cut less of a figure and not change her gown so often; but perhaps she will be happier."

As she said that, Frédérique fixed her eyes on me for a moment, then continued:

"I hope, messieurs, that you will forgive me now for advising you both to stay away from Monsieur Sordeville's?"

"That is to say, madame, that we owe you our warmest thanks."

"Ach! ja! and I haf te note in your hand; id is alvays here—on my heart."

"You do me too much honor, baron," said Madame Dauberny, with a smile; "and I am quite sure that everybody doesn't do as you have done."

I would have been glad to be rid of the baron, for I had many questions to ask Frédérique. I do not know whether she divined my thought, but she ordered her coachman to drive back to Paris.

"I will not abuse your good nature any longer, messieurs," she said. "I carried you both away rather unceremoniously; and perhaps somebody is impatiently awaiting you."

"No; I am not avaited at all," said the baron; "I am te master of my time."

"Where were you going, baron?" Frédérique asked, as if she had not heard what he said.

"Montame—I vas going—I know not—I vas going novere."

"But as I am going somewhere, I will set you down at your hôtel, then I will take Monsieur Rochebrune home."

I was well pleased that she proposed to set down the baron first. To no purpose did he say again and again that no one was expecting him, that he was not sure that he wanted to go home; Madame Dauberny replied simply:

"I am very sorry; but I can't drive you about all day."

Before long, she ordered the coachman to stop; the carriage door was opened and she offered the baron her hand, saying:

"Adieu! until I have the pleasure of seeing you again."

Herr von Brunzbrack decided at last, although with great reluctance, to alight; but when he was on the ground, he looked at me and beckoned:

"Vell! vhy haf not you come, too?"

"Because Monsieur Rochebrune is going in another direction, and I am going to drive him part of the way."

As she spoke, Frédérique motioned to the coachman to drive on, paying no heed to the baron, who declared that he wanted to stay with me. The poor Prussian stood on the same spot, and glared at me in a far from friendly fashion.

"I am not sorry to be rid of the baron," said Frédérique, "for I want to talk with you; if you are really in no hurry, suppose we take a turn in the Bois?"

"That will give me great pleasure, madame, for I too long to talk with you."

"Take us to the Bois de Boulogne, *cocher*.—Ah! if the poor baron knew this, he would be frantic!"

"Yes, for he's terribly jealous; he sees a rival in every man who has the privilege of knowing you."

"The man believes that everybody's in love with me! he is too stupid! But let us say no more of the baron and his love, which disturbs me very little. Let us come to what interests you. You want to know, of course, what has become of Armantine? Before a stranger, I would not betray her incognito; but to you, it seems to me that I may safely tell where she is, so that you can go there and condole with her. Armantine is living at Passy, on the Grande Rue, near the forest; she has taken the name of Madame Montfort. That is what I had to tell you."

"Is that all, madame?"

"Why, I should suppose that it was a great deal to you, to know what has become of the lady of your thoughts."

"Frédérique, are you willing that we should be friends again?"

As I spoke, I held out my hand. She turned her head away, and for some seconds seemed to hesitate; then she gave me her hand, and replied in a voice that was not quite steady:

"Well, yes, I am willing; sincere friends; all except the *tutoiement;* for I realize that that is impossible; anyone who heard us would form wrong conclusions."

"Very good. But no more mystery between us; absolute and mutual confidence. If you knew how deeply I have regretted having angered you! You were so severe with me! You spoke to me so frigidly, and sometimes with a touch of irony even."

"Let's forget all that. I am a little whimsical! But it's all over now. We are reconciled. As for—as for what made me angry, I am sure that you won't be guilty of the same offence again. You were a little bewildered that night—otherwise, it never would have occurred to you to kiss me."

I was at a loss what to reply; for there are offences for which it is a blunder to apologize. But Frédérique gave me no time, for she continued:

"Once more, let's say no more about it! The poet is right when he sings:

"'The past is but a dream!'

From this day forth, we are and will remain good friends. You will tell me all your secrets, make me the confidante of all your love affairs. How entertaining it will be to know everything!"

"And you, Frédérique, will you tell me all your thoughts, all the feelings that agitate your heart?"

"To be sure! But you will receive few confidences from me, for I have no intrigues now. I don't propose to form any more liaisons of that sort. In short, I am done with loving; I am happy as I am. I have resolved never to listen to any man again."

"At your age! Nonsense! That resolution won't last long."

"Very well; if I change—why, I'll let you know. But let us come to you, the man of the thousand and one

passions! You ought to tell the story of them, as a supplement to the *Thousand and One Nights.*"

"That may have been true once; but I've been getting rusty of late. It isn't virtue, I suppose; but I fancy that I am becoming hard to please."

"You will undoubtedly hasten to console Armantine, who may, perhaps, regret her former position in society, but surely doesn't regret her husband!"

"I, go to see Madame—Madame Montfort! Oh, no! no, indeed! Do you imagine that I still love her?"

"Of course! Weren't you mad over her?"

"Love is a form of madness that can be cured, and I am surprised that you think it possible for me to love that woman still—after the scene that you witnessed on the Champs-Élysées."

"What do you say? What scene?"

"Oh! my dear friend, let us not begin already to go back on the promise we made only a moment ago! You were on the Champs-Élysées, were you not, when an intoxicated man claimed acquaintance with me?"

"Yes; that is, I arrived just at the end. Armantine was running away; I saw that."

"It was you who paid the man who threatened to have the unfortunate fellow I had thrown down arrested."

Frédérique said nothing; she dared not deny it.

"How much did you give the man?"

"Twenty-nine francs, I believe."

"Here is the money, my dear friend; accept at the same time my thanks for your kind impulse, which did not occur to me, because I thought of nothing but that woman who was running away from me. Furthermore, I know that you also offered money to that poor devil, whom I left there."

"That is true; but he refused it."

"I know that too. Ah! Frédérique, *you* are kind-hearted; you have a generous heart, superior to the prejudices of society. You would not have run away from me, then closed your door to me, simply because a man in cap and blouse had called me his friend!"

Frédérique turned her face away, but her voice trembled as she replied:

"No, of course not! But you must forgive such foibles—the result of a false way of looking at things."

"Forgive jeers, sarcasm, insults, neglect, if you please; I can understand that; but contempt! never! Love must necessarily be destroyed where contempt shows its head."

"But suppose that she has repented of her treatment of you?"

"True; she may have done so, since she has learned that her husband is a spy!"

"Rochebrune! that was a very spiteful remark of yours!"

"I am entitled to say what I think of that lady."

"You are very angry with her, which proves that you still love her."

"When you mention her to me, I remember how she treated me; but for that, I should not think of her at all. In short, I no longer love her."

"You say that because she isn't here. But if you should find yourself looking into her lovely eyes——"

"I should remember the way they looked at me at our last interview on the Champs-Élysées; and I assure you that those eyes would no longer endanger my repose."

"Really? do you no longer love Armantine?"

Frédérique turned toward me as she asked the question, and I had never seen such an expression of satisfaction and pleasure in her eyes.

"If I still loved her, why should I conceal it from you? You know, we are to tell each other everything now."

"True; for we are friends now. We won't lose our tempers with each other any more, will we?"

"I wasn't the one who lost my temper."

"You will come to see me, I hope?"

"You will allow me to?"

"Of course, as the past is only a dream. And I will come to your rooms—as a friend. I am a man, you know. I don't see why I should not come to see you—unless, of course, it would displease you?"

"Never!"

"In any event, when you have company, or when you expect some fair one, you can tell me so, and I will leave you at liberty. It's agreed, isn't it? I shall not come to see you on any other condition."

"It's agreed."

I took Frédérique's hand again and pressed it warmly, nor did she think of withdrawing it. At that moment, we passed a riding party. The young dandies of whom it was composed glanced into our carriage as they passed. Frédérique suddenly turned pale. I looked up, and recognized one of the cavaliers as Monsieur Saint-Bergame. At the same moment I heard his voice, and distinguished this sentence, the last words coming very indistinctly as he receded:

"Ah! so it's that fellow now! Each in his turn!"

Madame Dauberny withdrew her hand from mine, her features contracted, her brow grew dark; but she said nothing. I too was silent; for, not knowing whether she

had heard what Saint-Bergame said, I was careful not to tell her. But I had a feeling of embarrassment and of wrath, which banished all the pleasurable sensations of a moment before.

We drove a considerable distance without speaking; and when she turned so that I could see her face, which she had kept averted for a long while, I detected tears in her eyes.

I quickly grasped her hand again, saying:

"What is the matter?"

Thereupon she at once resumed her usual manner, as if she were ashamed that I had observed her emotion, and answered, with a smile:

"Nothing, nothing at all! Mon Dieu! my friend, can one always tell what the matter is? It all depends on one's frame of mind. We are sometimes deeply moved by a remark that isn't worth the labor of listening to.—Take us home, *cocher*.—I can properly say *home*, for, thank heaven! I am alone, and mistress of the house for the present."

"Your husband is——?"

"He is not in Paris; he has gone on a little trip, according to the word he sent to me; and you can imagine that I did not detain him. It is true that Monsieur Dauberny doesn't interfere with me in any way, that he doesn't prevent me from doing whatever I please; but, for all that, I feel happier when I know that he isn't under the same roof. Oh! if only he could travel forever!"

I was certain that the man had fled after the ill-fated Annette's death; perhaps he was afraid that she would make damaging disclosures before she died. I was persuaded that fear alone had driven him from Paris, and

that he proposed to wait until that affair was forgotten before he returned.

"How long has your husband been absent?" I asked Frédérique.

"About three weeks."

"When is he coming back?"

"I have no idea; you may be sure that I didn't ask him. But, my friend, you seem to take a great deal of interest in my husband's movements: can it be that his absence distresses you?"

I tried to smile, as I answered:

"Oh! not in the least, I beg you to believe. I asked you the question—I don't quite know why."

Frédérique looked earnestly at me and squeezed my hand hard, murmuring:

"So it is true that even sincere friends can't tell each other everything."

The calèche stopped on the boulevard, and I left Madame Dauberny.

"We shall meet again soon," I said.